

# VARIANT

summer 85



a radical arts magazine



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BRITISH ART SHOW  
STEVEN CAMPBELL, PUNK.**

a radical  
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arts magazine

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GLASGOW.

P.S. John A. Walker's article is from a forthcoming book on the relation between fine art and popular music. Cliff Harper's article first appeared in the New Anarchist Review No. 2. Thanks to the aforementioned for letting us use their articles. Thanks to the Fruitmarket Gallery for boosting our confidence, a 'partisan' greetings to the Scottish Contemporary Arts Review, which although completely different from our intentions, gave us our only review, and very favourable it was to.

The old mole Marx spoke of is still digging away: a toast to the proletarians of Europe.

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# NOTICE OF EXHIBITION

The question as to what social role remains for art, or whether indeed it is an activity that one could devote oneself to with the least morsel of integrity in the circumstances of the present day, is a very pressing one. Circumstances such as mass unemployment, the threat of nuclear annihilation, growing authoritarianism, the administration of almost all aspects of experience, the erosion of traditional working-class and community structures... The future is (to say the least) uncertain.

The current predicament has fostered a conservative and reactionary attitude in all sectors of society, art included. But, at the same time, many artists have felt the urgency to express their growing unease, anger, uncertainty and despair of the present: vide group shows such as "Nineteen Eighty-four" and "Geometry of Rage", which dealt with such themes as power and repression, patriarchy, war and death. Even the official "British Art Show" includes a section called "Critical Attitudes". While we despise the idea, held in certain quarters, of turning such discomfort and Angst into a fashionable genre, we believe that there are many artists, perhaps with few ties to the intricate complacency of the official art world, whose work reflects the realities of our age, and who seek through their art to undermine the power structures at work in society.

With this in mind we are organizing an exhibition to be held in Glasgow in September 1985. We hope to show work being done which attempts to come to grips with the social and psychological forces at work in society and which aims to contest them. As well as including traditional media such as painting and sculpture, we particularly welcome work by artists in performance, film, video, photography, etc. Documentation on community art projects will be accommodated, as will work by left-wing

artists linked to the labour and peace movements. As our aim is also to contest the class divide between high and low culture, we will encourage work which uses mass-culture sources.

We seek, by means of this exhibition, to make a coherent critique contesting the values of a dominant culture which would, if it could, redeem such discontent into yet another commodity. We are also attempting to open up and encourage discussion on cultural politics.

Work will be accepted in the following categories:

Painting, Sculpture, Prints, Performance, Film, Video, Photography, Slide.

Selection will be made on two counts:

1. On the 'strength' (aesthetic) of the work submitted;
2. On the submission of a written synopsis by the artist on his or her work, not exceeding 500 words.

Slides or photographs of works and the written synopsis (or descriptions of performance pieces, film, video, slide etc.) should be sent as soon as possible to:

EXHIBITION COMMITTEE

C/O HELEN FLOCKART

76 BUCCLEUCH STREET

GARNETHILL

GLASGOW.

P.S. Insurance and transport costs will be borne by us.

# Three views of the British Art Show

The arts are now in situation where they can't but command the attention of the intelligent and concerned. Alternatives are restricted. Music is dead. Films are stupid. The church is a con. Government is by shopkeeper once again. Anybody looking for answers in the next five years will go first to the TV, then to the library, then to the workable arts.

Peter O'Connor in PS (Primary Sources on the Performing Arts)

One has to believe in something if any real change is to be sought. O'Connor's dictum, however, whether a substitute for political radicalism or a naive display of the bourgeois indulgence in Western privilege, is a hard half-bricke to swallow, even if it was written some six years ago (if my mind serves me correctly). In a world without God, without myth, without value, and without poetry, artists can go unscathed for being so presumptuous. I remember, and I cringe, of being fuelled by that statement, as the post-punk "Fun is Done, Grim is In" beat battered against the meaningless pap of pop culture: Art (without begging the question as to what that actually is) was one of the few signals emanating from a more intense life. And only art could hold any sense in the ensuing mediocrity to come.

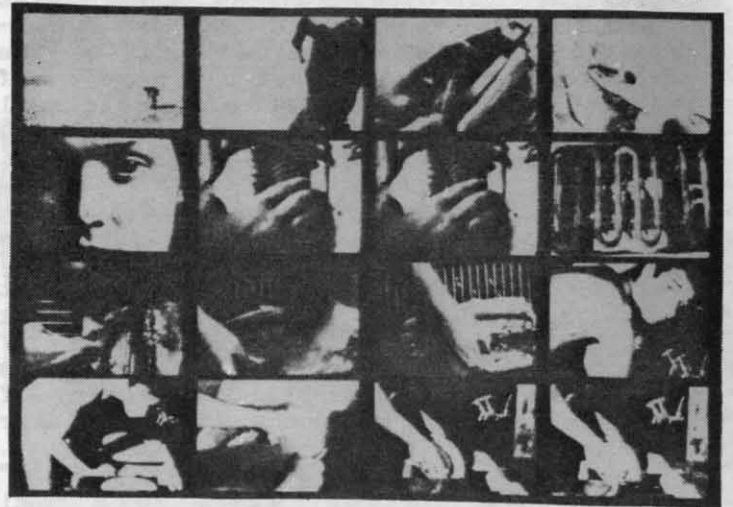
Times change, though the values of our society don't. Not for want of grasping, all my youthful dreams are now well out of reach. Mediocrity it came, and a spell at art school with its modest attempts at wallpaper decoration and intellectual cretinization, well and truly burned that illusion of the spirit. It seems odd, however, that after witnessing the British Art Show in Edinburgh recently, this dilemma of meaning (so central to the psyche!) has come flooding back through the dim mists of time, bringing with it more angst-ridden doubt than a self-satisfied glow of wisdom.

Setting out on what must be my fifth attempt at a fair and comprehensive review of the British Art Show (B.A.Sh.), I ask myself; are these artists, along with the selectors, playing fine tricks on madness? and more poignantly; can the arts command the attention of anyone, bar that lot - who through their often self-imposed marginalisation - have come to be known as the lunatic fringe? Is this really an important time for art, or are those concerned just pretending it is, for the point has been made often that as art becomes more of a futile waste of time, the more willing are its advocates to step forward and claim its value. With reality knocking on art's doorstep, like the ghost of Duncan returning to haunt Elsinore Castle, I hear the most class guilty of the art establishment cry: "but what could we have done for the miners?". The answer was always simple; stop being a socially concerned artist and get out with a collector's tin!

## The Mountains are in Labour



On the other hand, it seems hopelessly inadequate to write off art as a refuge for imposters. One cannot accuse all artists of ideological default as so much as discuss the incapacities of the visual arts in tackling politics outrightly. If this is the midnight of the century as the American radical thinker put it, surely we can do without cynical resignation. This being so, if art is a way of thinking about the world - of existing in the world and



# our . . . . . What will be born?

remaking it - the second thing we can do without is irresponsible writing on art, and thirdly uninspiring artists. While the selectors of the B.A.Sh cannot be criticised for the former two, their judgement can at times in the latter - though my dislike for particular artists and their products is no reason to exclude them, from what was, after all, a survey show. I don't intend in so much as reviewing the show, or presenting an overview of the enormity of the questions it raises. What was of value in the show will only make sense if it has been seen, or observed in the catalogue. So no shouts of obscurity, please. Indeed, since the catalogue essays approached an analysis of the arts in relation to their wider social contexts, they should be read. Disgraceful as it may seem

to say so, this critical perspective was unique simply in the fact of being one.

It was the irresponsibility of art criticism that Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton condemned - albeit liberally - in a lecture given at Glasgow School of Art (on 8/2/85; see interview in this issue) - suspecting much of the writing surrounding "Zeitgeist" as being in this bad genre - saying that the obscurantism of writing we are all guilty of. At times. It is the blending of the aesthetic and the moral that she holds up as presenting a new dynamic in painting, holding up Blake as a model for being both a visionary artist and a polemicist. This call for a return of History Painting is taken up most forcibly by Sandy Moffat in his article "New



## "THE PROPER SUBJECT OF ART TODAY"

Discussion in St. Cecilia's Hall, Cowgate, Edinburgh on

One of a series of public lectures and discussions held in Edinburgh to coincide with The British Art Show's sojourn in that city. Sederunt Mr. Bill Buchanan of Glasgow School of Art (in chair); Mr. Nigel Greenwood, gallery owner; Ms. Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton, one of the British Art Show's three selectors; Mr. Andrew Brown, who runs the 369 Gallery in Edinburgh; and Mr. Bruce McLean, an artist who makes a living from gallery sales, whose boorish manner saved the occasion from being too genteel and polite. Also present were a motley collection of artists, students, lecturers, cognoscenti, would-be cognoscenti, critics and other riff-raff.

Most of the discussion was taken up, unsurprisingly, with the topic of the Show and the state of contemporary art in general, with Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton getting a bit of a grilling because of her role as selector. It became apparent, indeed, that the Show was generally regarded as less than satisfactory. "We all agree the Show's a failure,"

said Andrew Brown, and nobody contradicted him. There was a strong feeling that the work exhibited was fashionable rather than good ("flavour-of-the-month painters"). The selectors, suggested Mr. Brown, tended to choose the "etoilles" of the art colleges, e.g. Stephen Cambell, who was selected for no other reason than that he had made a name for himself in New York. The organisers had committed a great fault, he thought, by representing Scottish art by the most "hysterical and melodramatic" works, and by their neglect of what he called the "picture-making tradition". Comparisons were drawn between the state of art in Britain and in Germany, where artists enjoy a much greater degree of support, partly because the government of the Federal Republic was prepared to spend money on art rather than armaments. There was some criticism of the Arts Council, with Bruce McLean roundly declaring it should be abolished, and pouring scorn on its efforts to educate the public.

As to the Proper Subject, the main suggestions were:

(1) That the very idea of a subject in art is unenlightened; art is what remains after the subject-matter is exhausted; we should confine ourselves to

talking of artistic practice instead (Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton). "A clear idea is another name for a little idea," she said, quoting Burke. She rejected the notion of political subject-matter - art was not ideology - but conceded that art can be "mobilized" by political passions. In favour of complete individualism. "I look for hermetic quality over above intellectual frisson".

(2) The proper subject of art today is to be improper and filthy (a contribution from Bruce McLean, delivered in the voice of a small petulant bull);

(3) The proper subject of art is Truth (delivered from the floor of the hall, with an air of imparting esoteric knowledge gained over a lifetime's hard experience);

(4) The proper subject of art is anything the artist wants it to be;

(5) The proper subject of art today is opposition to the political and economic status quo. (Peter Seddon, from the floor)

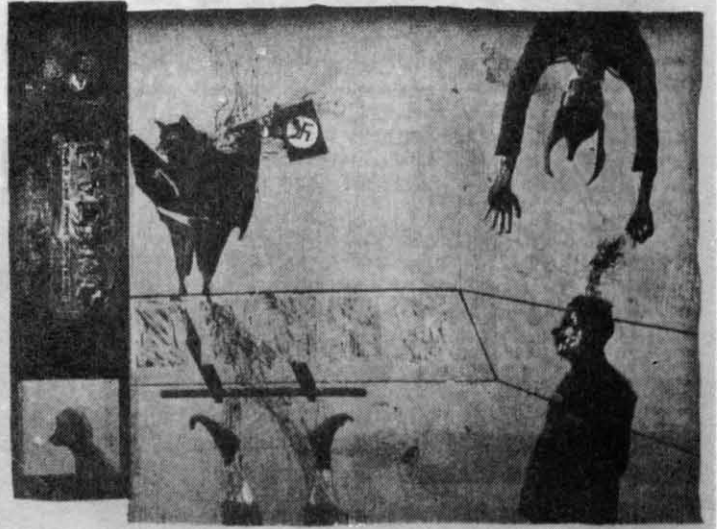


"Painting and Old Painting", paying homage to the moral force of Beckmann, a force that sees itself taken up in the work of Edward Burra, Stanley Spencer, Francis Bacon and John Bellany.

He sees the post-war battle between figuration and abstraction being finally won through by a return to the figurative tradition, a 'victory' heralded by the "School of London", a group of painters that included R.B. Kitaj, Bacon, Hockney, Lucian Freud, and Frank Auerbach. Though not sharing his enthusiasm for these artists, except perhaps in Kitaj and Bacon, he sees these artists as having fought the dominance of American Modernism through the 60's and 70's, with a figurative style of painting that hoped for a renewal of a visionary language in art; a specifically European tradition of picturing-making that would assert the social dimension of art through, we presume, the specifically human content. It is in this respect that Moffat has embraced this return to figuration, and it is indeed what Jon Thomson (the third of the 3 selectors) sees as the most radical characteristic of Post-Modernist art in its capacity to challenge Modernism (of art speaking only to itself), no doubt, in its ability to tackle politics, history and literature.

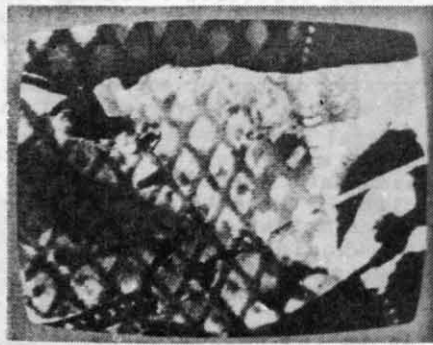
Accordingly, the model that is held up by the critics here are the German painters of today, with strong roots in their Expressionist past. There are indeed lessons to be learned from the dynamism of these painters, for it is Germany that gives us the best explanation of the cultural upheaval that is currently being explored to a questionable degree by such painters as Immendorf, Baselitz, Lupertz and Penck: a razed post-war nation with a cultural vacuum in the country's history. It is worth noting that this gap (largely

untouched by American cultural imperialism) has given rise to some outstanding artists in the field of music; Stockhausen, Ligeti, Can an Faust (aaaaarrggghh!!!!!!). The implication of such a diversion here is that art history and cultural awareness are not detached from the social and political contexts in which they are created, and that writing on art, for it to have any sense at all, entails an historic consciousness on the development/decomposition of Western culture, and at the same time, an awareness of a country's cultural and political processes. (Lest I be accused of the political obtuseness that befalls many writers on art, may I say that I seriously doubt the current Italian and German artists' involvement in their country's Left-wing movements, as we are supposed to think.)



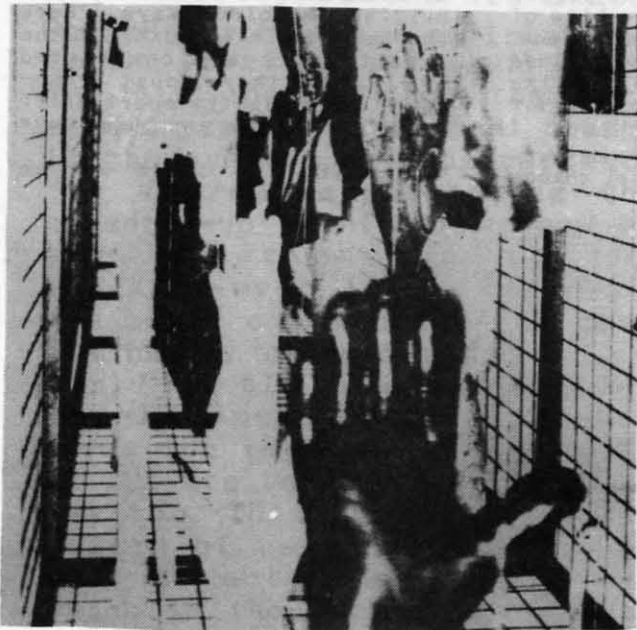
The failure of socialism is something that seems to tinge the work of Terry Atkinson, and like his American contemporary, Leon Golub, his paintings are savage and brutal, dealing with political corruption and power. Unlike Golub, however, Atkinson attempts to sue humour through his titles, which are more like texts. This is black comedy, enough to give Trotsky a splitting headache, no doubt. Ha-ha. Oh, the burden of being a Trot. The other two painters that caught my attention also incorporated words into their works: John Hyatt's "Art, Wars, Division and Design", makes a direct comment on the figurative/abstraction hostility, and Graham Durward's "First Crime in the Forest" is a brash example of Neo-Expressionism.

If painting at times seems unable to cope with the implications of modern technology and of the threat posed by the spectacle of modern life, it is in the area of extended media that proves fitting when moral outrage is the motive. In the B.A.Sh. this is best represented by Gerald Newman's sound piece "South Atlantic", Sandra Goldbacher's "Polka Dots and Moonbeams", and in Kevin Atherton's installation video "Video Times". The first of these three uses quotes from



newspapers intermixed with scripted passages in a subliminal effect. Goldbacher's film is a torrential bombardment of images, some from old films, intercut and overlapping with staged sequences, and with a crazy soundtrack, this is as dazzling as Atherton's video is incisive: in "Video Times", two TV screens face each other, one with Atherton in head shot, the other with sequences from Coronation Street with Atherton delivering a critique of the medium of TV and of the way it stupefies our behaviour. Social relations mediated by images, is the message of the medium in these latter two works.

Stuart Brisley is some one I've always admired ever since seeing his film "arbeit Macht Frei" and in Ken McMullen's film "Ghost Dance". In the former we were subjected to Brisley throwing up for minutes on end in front of the camera, and later in pushing the physical to transgression when attempting to drown himself for the sake of art. Brilliant! In the B.A.Sh. Brisley was represented by a loing cage containing a vast array of hanging gloves. This immediately appealed to me, later discovering the reason for this was because I had seen it before: in my kitch there a couple of pair of industrial rubber gloves which have found a home hanging from a badly painted wooden pulley. Talk about art spilling over into life.



Of course, there are works which can do without interpretation of content in a didactic way - to my senses anyway: the liberating gestures of Bruce MacLean, the sensual calm of Jo Baer, the mystical landscapes of Therese Oulton, the Celtic incantations of John Bellany, the ritual of Alistair MacLennan, and the list goes on. In art, the idea presents an argument and acts as sensory experience; not always together, and never just alone. Some art finds its strength in its silences, some on its power to morally arouse the spectator, it can be both and of course, can be

almost anything in between. Perhaps, then, this is what Post-Modernism is?

It was by all accounts a successful 'interpretative' summary, and it did to an extent put British art in perspective for me. It was a survey revolving around the mainstream, and as such, the mainstream is represented. That the artists involved will be held up as models is the expense paid for art schools' inability to be broad-minded, and this is perhaps what led Andrew Brighton in his review (in Art Monthly Feb 85) to call this "an exhibition of art school teachers, some recent students, and a few artist who make a living out of gallery sales. If this is history, then it is bad history." That the challenge to Modernism is still in its infancy, the show is seminal - but don't quote me on it in a year's time.

So what function can painting have outside the intelligensia? Even more pressing: is this really a concern for many contemporary artists? Reading the British Art Show catalogue, the impression would be so, and, indeed, is the case for many of the artists in the show, if one bothers to find out about their past (Terry Atkinson, Art and Language, Susan Hiller, Mary Kelly, for example). Su Braden, in her book "Artists and People", stressed the necessity of artists to move towards the cultural context in which they want to work, to "act to produce the conditions in which the work will have relevance and meaning". Citing Walter Benjamin's ideas on the social theory of art, she writes of the "necessity to relate not content and form but context and form, in creative expression". This only hints at the starting point, however, but by simply taking modern art to the public (as in taking the British Art Show to the provinces), does not ensure a more appreciative audience for modern art. Sandy Moffat ends his essay (New Painting and Old Painting) with equally pertinent questions. This being one;

"Is the current preoccupation with the past a symptom of a reactionary, anti-Modernist conservatism? Or is it, on the other hand, a genuine attempt to forge a deeper, more meaningful and humane relationship with artist and public?"

Questions need to be raised again and again, especially now when the current trends still have to be critically differentiated, by more and more artists, more curious, and perhaps less impatient than I. The aforementioned selector will not be surprised, however, to learn that I am one of those who think that solutions are imperative, and that it 'posterity', as he puts it, stands in the way, it will, because of its obtuseness to contemporary needs, have to be overthrown, cast aside, or at best, mildly patted on the head.

In a time when art has been divested of its ability to the world, the extent of the artists marginalisation has to be fully comprehended, critically assessed. This is currently being taken up by some artists and critics, and the selectors of the B.A.Sh. are aware of this and to be generous, by their pens, are part of. It is, then, in the thrust of generating ideas that the real value lies here. For the moment, good art simultaneously expresses a view of the world and a view of art. The dilemma for those with such concerns expressed here, is not in how to make political art, but in how to make art political

Malcolm Dickson.

## KNEE DEEP IN PASTO

VARIANT ISSUE 2: Editorial Contribution, Ian Brown.

Notes on 'the British Art Show'.

ME.

I'm an unpractised viewer of current art.

WHAT I SAW.

'Art is represented here by painting, sculpture, photography, film and video. Selection seemed to have had some sort of theme which shows

as something in common between most of the exhibits: these characteristics in common -

- \* isolated & finite in space (or time)
- \* surface & depth of appearance / meaning
- \* 'artisty' technique, materials & feel
- \* codes
- \* a certain style.

These points are elaborated.

AN ARTIST'S VIEW OF THINGS.

- \* Many of the works refer to other works by other artists.

What will happen when other artists refer to these works refer to...?

Who will be sufficiently educated to view?

- \* Many of the works are in a mist: the deliberately painterly surface; a veil of powdery pain on painting / sculpture, a hide

of oils on photo or canvas, a sprinkling of careful dust on sculpture. One must look through this - easier with practice.

\* Most of the paintings are big. (This has an implication.)

\* Half the exhibits are churning.

\* A lot obscure the point by detail.

\* 'Artistry'. A bronze pot with loving polished surface pitted; a photograph mounted on stretched canvas; a pair of old legs attached to a steel and wood space dock; definite references to things artists use. Plus words & explanations.

\* Words and explanations. Quite helpful to the English-speaking.

\* A certain style resulting in common mistakes; viewers accidentally think the radiators, the helpful attendants, the buffet, are 'installations' (exhibits in oldspak).

\* What are the pictures etc. concerned with? Expressionism?

Academic exploration? Life? The exhibits are actually completely separate and kept apart from everyday life. Can anyone tell me why there is so much effort put into something that seems so marginal?

\* The unprepared viewer finds a careful viewing of the paintings exhausting. It is easier to see into exhibits which have something in sympathy with one's own interests either of content or technique; for example the 'political' or the 'naturalistic'. (The exhibition was split into topics in common between exhibits.) It is much more effort to see into other experiences. De-coding the codes themselves is exhausting.

\* I like looking at paintings because afterwards, returning to the everyday world I can juggle it into paintings; give bits of the world a deeper significance. In the same way the unexplained is an exhibit, its feel is like the unexplained in the street

(though this may be more dangerous or involve and actual chance of 'engagement').

#### JUDGEMENT.

More interesting and varied than many exhibitions; despite the words (which try to give clues to the exhibits) does seem to work on non-verbal communication - (this is hard to write about) but...

It's a funny set-apart world - no funnier though than pigeon fancying or rock climbing and just as valid. The difference is in the potential scope of art; the similarity is the abstraction / separation, 'art as a fetish, a hobby or truly alienated as a pastime'.

Despite the provenance, on emerging, and going to the new American luxe style Waverly Centre, the disorientation produced by its mirrored space was more fun than the exhibition. As British Petroleum says, 'Here the hardness & solidity of the granite rock are contrasted by...Only there, what brashness, the exhibits sport price tags. What'll the new thing be?'

\* In the "BP Guide to the British Art Show".



#### Some reflections provoked by The British Art Show

(1) My first impression of the show was one of disappointment, although I can't exactly say what I was expecting. There was a definite flavour of spiritual weariness about the whole thing, with a kind of dry intellectualism prevailing. For example, the selectors made a big thing of painting at this exhibition, owing to the current notion that the art of painting has undergone a great revival, which may in fact be the case. But quite a number of the works on show, while technically paintings in

that they consist of pigment on canvas, utilize such expressive means as built-in obsolescence (works that will soon fall to pieces), or deliberately bad painting (crude colour, clumsy drawing, dirty paint, brushwork that is either slapdash or lifelessly pedestrian). It seems that these artists, although ostensibly looking for a subject-matter that is not artistic practice itself, are really still playing the (by now) traditional and worn-out modernist game of art commenting on itself and its own means and methods. Similarly, you find a certain use of ready-made images re-arranged or isolated in order



to bring out and comment on their qualities as signs. Many artists do this kind of thing with material objects themselves; perhaps the use of painted images instead results in something more saleable?

One of the selectors has herself suggested that painting is a necessary art, since nothing can replace it in the sensuous empathy it arouses in the person viewing it. Most of the works were too arid to arouse much empathy. There were exceptions, such as Hotland and Auerbach.

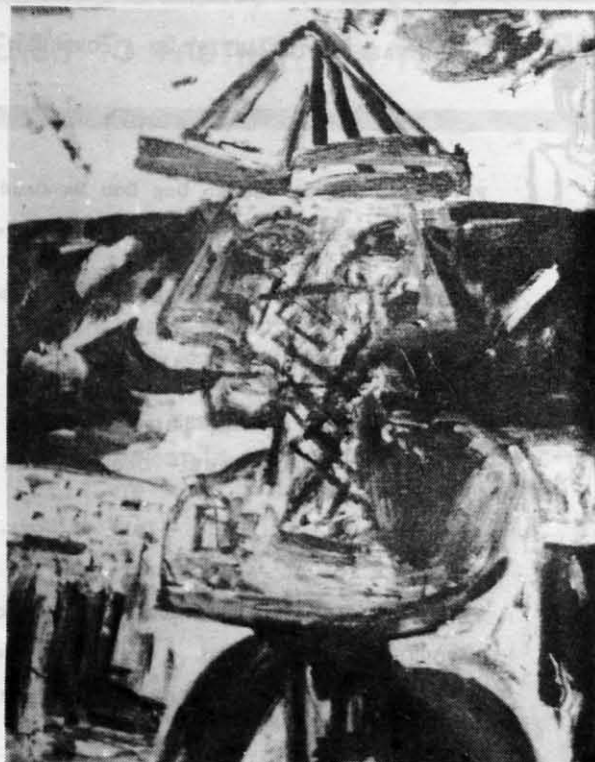
(2) Shortly before his death,

Roland Barthes gave an interview to the *Novel Observateur*. Asked for his comments on the increased pace of historical change in the present age, he replied: "We are not experiencing the speeding-up of history. What we are experiencing is the *speeding-up of little history*." The basic construction of cars has hardly changed since before World War II, but a newly styled model comes out every year, gives the impression that works of art are to be viewed in this way too. This pursuit of - and reward of newness for its own sake is not conducive to art which is thoughtful or original in any meaningful sense; it conduces instead to gimmickry and bandwagonjumping. And at a time when artists are supposed to be rediscovering history (as both Jon Thomson and Alexander Moffat suggest in their catalogue essays), what we all too often see instead is artists unable to regard the past as anything more than a handy quarry from which they can pick out fragments indiscriminately and stick them together any old how.

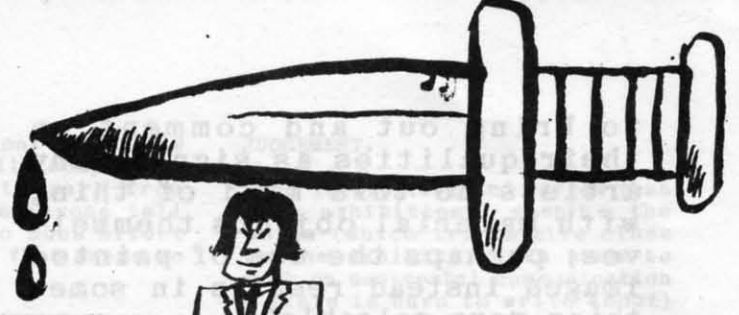
(3) Monetarist economics have evidently not yet filtered through the official art world, the financing of the show is still in the Keynesian tradition of the mixed economy (with a little Marshall Aid from Citibank). A true child of Beveridge

and the Welfare State, the Arts Council knows what's good for us, like a kind but firm teacher. In fact the whole presentation is embarrassingly condescending. Our cultural social workers out in the field, shouldering the white man's burden of bringing art to the provinces (the British Art Show is not designed for London) have made many concessions to the benighted natives; for example, the tandy outfits worn by the guards; "Show", a word known from Roman times to elicit a response from the proles, rather than the intellectual "Exhibition"; the helpful notices placed at the entrance to each gallery so that people know what to think. This is reminiscent of the directives from on high that go out every so often to simplify the language of Social Security forms ("What you must do" rather than the "Required preconditions for receipt of benefit"). Perhaps also there's just a whiff of Victorian piety: the gentleman who tries to spread the gospel of holy living to the factory children - who sometimes had the effrontery and ingratitude to reject his noble attempts at improving them.

Simon Brown.



# CYNICAL BASTARD



## THEOLOGY

The Reverend Tony Jones, the Glasgow School of Art Bishop has again been airing his controversial views about the symbolic nature of "The Degree" and the lack of concrete historical proof that there is or ever has been a "Structured Course" in the Glasgow School of Art (GSA).

"Of course, when people ask me nowadays as to whether or not "The Degree" has, in any sense, a literal 'Meaning' in today's modern secular age then I would have to say, with my hand on my wallet, a most emphatic no. I can only say that 'The Degree' has a symbolic meaning.

"Of course this does not mean to say that it does not exert a powerful influence within the GSA and within Art Schools generally.

"The power it gives is one of Academic Respectability on a par with the Universities so that members of staff can feel more at ease with their guaranteed tenure of employment while they sit around in bars leching at young girl students (And my! Don't they get younger every year!)

"And as for the 'Structured Course'! Well, what can I say? For many years now we have had many 'Committees' to discuss the theoretical and theological significance of the 'Structured Course' and I am sorry that I have to admit that, with my hand on my wallet, that there is not and never has been or ever will be any concrete historical proof that a 'Structured Course' has ever or ever will exist in the GSA. This is not to say that there have not been attempts by a few brave souls to create this phenomenon but all such attempts have been doomed to fail because too many of the staff have been prepared to sit around in bars, leching at young girls .....etc."



## PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A CONSUMER

/ NEIL DALLAS BROWN

- FAVOURITE GROUP - Bonzo Dog Doo Da Band.
- FAVOURITE SONGS - "How much is that doggy in the window?"
- FAVOURITE CARTOON CHARACTERS - Deputy Dog / Huckleberry Hound.
- FAVOURITE FILMS - Dog Day Afternoon / 101 Dalmations / Straw Dogs.
- FAVOURITE ACTOR / ACTRESS - Lassie.
- FAVOURITE TV PROGRAMME - One Man And His Dog.
- FAVOURITE HOLIDAY PLACE - Isle of Dogs.
- FAVOURITE TOILET PAPER - Andrex.
- FAVOURITE WARTIME HERO - Bulldog Drummond.
- FAVOURITE WAY TO TRAVEL - Greyhound Bus.
- FAVOURITE SEXUAL POSITION - "It's not the Missionary, I can tell you that."

## MOULDY OLD DOUGH

Students! Beware! If any of you look like becoming the Next Big thing in the Art World then there is a member of staff who is very willing to buy a drawing (at a cheap price of course) from you at your degree show. What's wrong with that you may ask? Well, the only problem is that this member of staff (who shall remain nameless but there are some clues in this article) likes to buy his investments with post-dated cheques. Usually three or four months in advance. So we say - Don't make the Academic mistake of accepting a post-dated cheque. And if it happens then Register your complaint with the appropriate authorities.



## ARTISTS FOR PEACE...AND QUIET

GLASGOW ART CLUB ANNOUNCES THE FORMATION OF THE A.P.Q. (ARTISTS FOR PEACE.....AND QUIET). THIS ORGANISATION IS DEDICATED TO THE PURSUIT OF (MALE) ARTISTS POPPING DOWN TO THE ART CLUB AT DINNER TIME TO GET QUIETLY INEBRIATED BEFORE HEADING BACK TO ART SCHOOL TO GIVE STUDENTS A "HELPING HAND" WITH THEIR PAINTINGS. IT IS IN THIS WAY THAT STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO LEARN THE WORLD FAMOUS GLASGOW STYLE OF DRAWING AND PAINTING, A STYLE WHICH WAS SUMMED UP IN THAT MEMORABLE PHRASE OF MANY YEARS AGO AS "TAKING A LINE FOR A DRUNKEN SWAGGER".

## Just before we GO-GO...

Rumour has it that a leading functionary in the Scottish Arts Council is a fervent admirer of the Performance Art of go-go dancers and strippers in the City of Edinburgh's public houses.

So much so that a substantial award (£25,000?) was made to a group of "video artists" a few years ago to make a documentary of this particular branch of the Performance Art field. The resulting video was then submitted to the Edinburgh Film Festival and was rejected as being pornographic.

However there is no truth in the rumour that a leading Scottish Arts Council bureaucrat keeps a copy of this video in his home so as to "relieve the tension" after a hard day's work in the office.

(if you know any more details to this rumour let us know)

TEN YEARS OF THE GLASS EYE CENTRE.

As part of its Tenth Anniversary celebrations the Glass Eye Centre proudly presents those shows that you hoped you would never see again.

The "Head Butt" Performance Piece.

One of Scotland's leading Arts Council functionaries performs his amazing "Head Butt" act (last seen in Edinburgh's Doric Tavern after the British Art Show opening).

"The Measuring Tape Performance Piece".

One of Scotland's leading experts in the field of "Measuring Tapes" gives a demonstration on "The Art of Measuring the Back Seat of a Car". This leading artist (well known for his liberal views on relationships with young female students) shows how it is possible to ascertain whether or not the "Back Seat" of any particular car has ample room to allow comfort and joy for both passengers. Especially when the car is not moving.

As this leading Marxist-Leninist theoretician said recently "Any time I'm taking a 'bird' out for the first time I like to impress her. So I always make me way down to a local car Hire Firm armed with me handy 'Measuring Tape'".

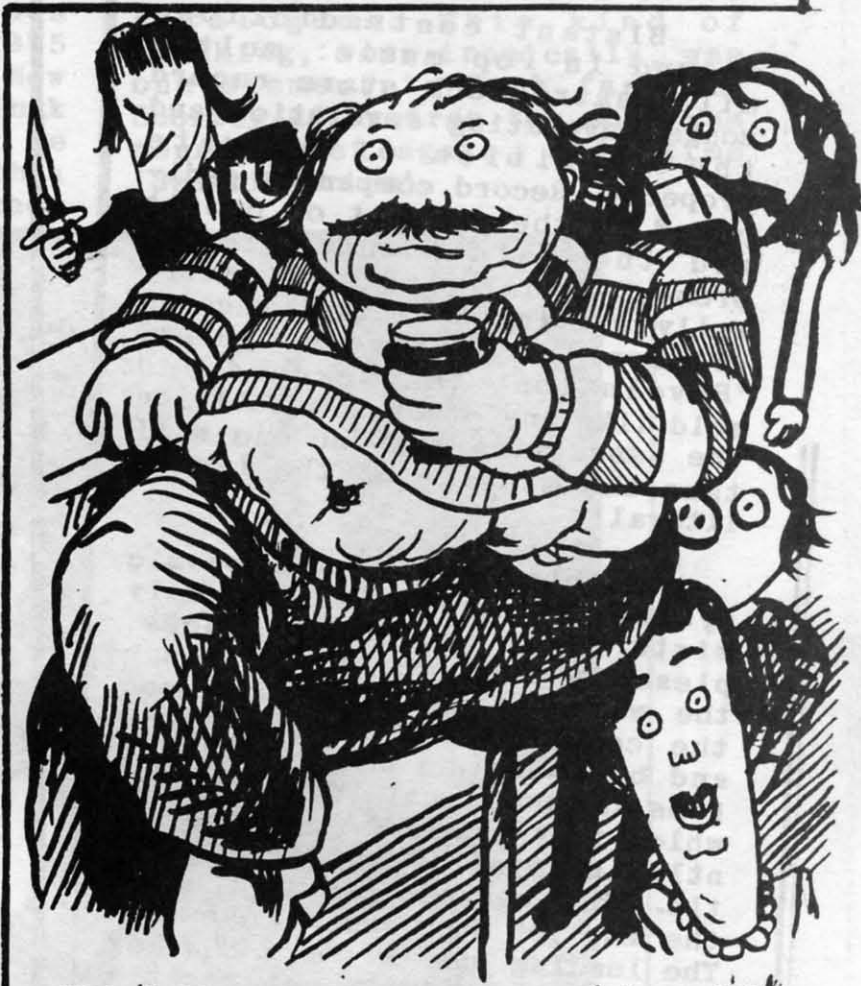
Unfortunately this strategy does not always work.

"Sometimes, like, the car might break down for hours and, like, me and the 'bird' haven't got acquainted enough.

"You know this happened once when I had gone to all the trouble of taking her out to a hotel in the countryside and like I spent all this money on a meal and, like, nothing happened."

PLAY:-

"How To Get Your Nuts in May" - a new production by Squirrel Gerber.



HERE'S TO ANOTHER TEN YEARS! CHEERS!

POEM NUMER SIX

Baby's in the cage:  
Toy's divert his rage.

Self contained by bars  
Looks out on alien stars.

Wherever ego, I go too.  
(What id, the meaning is hid).  
Now's the time to make a bid,  
But will you pay the price?  
(Put it on ice, this id nice).

All that pain to catch a train  
Entering an endless tunnel.....

Tunnel-brain, Tunnel-brains,  
Sing the children born of Cain;  
Hark the Mark the Magic Spark,  
Catch a stranger in the dark.

With what do you associate  
Late Great Lamented State?  
Hate Hate Hate Hate Hate Hate Hate.

Easy rhyme, easy time,  
Now the man's beyond his prime  
Still he won't admit his crime.

It's all a mime:  
A mime of information.

You won't get it.

Billy Barland.

by John A. Walker

Blatant contradictions abound in Pop music: multi-millionaire rock stars record songs advocating revolution and the abolition of private property. Record companies dedicated to the pursuit of profit and the maintenance of the present social system are generally willing to market records critical of that very system. 'Revolution' is packaged and sold like any other commodity on the assumption that no one will take the message of the lyrics literally.

Within the present economic system Pop music is an unholy mixture of art and business, pleasure and profit. Although the music industry depends upon the co-operation of musicians and businessmen the value systems and political ideologies to which they subscribe are frequently incompatible or antagonistic. This was especially true of the English Punk rock movement. The leading Punk group - the Sex Pistols - were extremely critical of existing rock bands and superstars, the music business, and indeed British society as a whole. They espoused a crude form of anarchism the main slogans of which were 'Chaos' and 'Destroy'. Their attitude towards the record companies was one of cynical exploitation (a neat reversal of roles). Given the hard fact that no cultural revolution can succeed in its goals in the absence of a general political revolution, the Sex Pistols were bound eventually to fail. In the end the only way they could maintain the integrity of their position was to destroy themselves (that is, to disband the group, abandon the project; in the case of Sid

Vicious the self-destruction was literal). The Sex Pistols fulfilled their own dire prediction: 'No future'. However, their efforts were not wasted. For a period in the late 1970s they created havoc in the overlapping realms of Pop music and the mass media. Many of their records are still considered too subversive to be played on British radio.

The contradictory nature of Pop music makes it a fertile site for cultural struggle. Enter Malcolm McLaren, variously characterised as a Chelsea shopkeeper, Situationist spiv, media guerilla, Sex Pistols manager, and "the individual singly most responsible for the fundamental changes undergone by British music and youth culture since 1976".

During his 'career' McLaren has been involved in a dozen different enterprizes but he will be chiefly remembered in the annals of Pop music as the manager of the Sex Pistols, as the Svengali of Punk.

McLaren was born in London in 1946 into a middle-class family involved in the rag trade. During the 1960s he spent eight years attending various London art schools (Harrow, Croydon, and Goldsmiths). In 1968, while at Croydon he took part in a student sit-in with Jamie Reid (later to become the graphic designer of the Sex Pistols), and organize a radical festival. A photograph taken at art school shows that he produced large, abstract, shaped canvases at one time. Besides painting, McLaren was also interested in Happenings (he organized one at the Kinley Street Gallery) and in rock 'n' roll.

The 1960s was a decade of student revolt and cultural revolution; McLaren's thinking was deeply influenced by these events and by what he had

learned about the avant garde art movements of the twentieth century. In the early 1970s McLaren began a career as a salesman by selling old records in Oxford Street. With Vivienne Westwood, a self-taught fashion designer, he then opened a shop at 430 Kings Road called 'Let it Rock' specializing in 1950s Teddy Boy clothing. In 1975 McLaren spent six months in New York managing the American Punk group the New York Dolls. He attempted to endow them with a Communist image by dressing them

all in red and getting them to play in front of images of Chairman Mao and hammer and sickle banners. Returning to London he and Vivienne renamed the shop 'Sex' and began to sell leather, bondage and fetish clothing usually found in Soho sex shops and in mail order catalogues. This kind of clothing, worn ironically, was one element in Punk fashion. Shortly afterwards the shop was renamed yet again, this time 'Seditionaries'.



From amongst the disaffected youths hanging around the shop McLaren formed the Sex Pistols and the English Punk movement raged for about two years. The story of the rise of the Sex Pistols is retold in the film 'The great rock and roll swindle' directed by Julien

Temple. McLaren appears as himself and explains step-by-step how to exploit and bamboozle the Pop music industry. Following the disintegration of Punk, McLaren acted as a consultant to Adam Ant, and formed a new group 'Bow Wow Wow' with the fourteen year old lead singer Annabella

Lwin. The clothes of this group derived from the Chelsea shop now called 'World's End'. At this time a pirate, native, red indian image was being promoted (pirates are romantic lawbreakers). In the early 1980s McLaren travelled the world - United States, South America and Africa - searching in rural backwoods and urban ghettos for the roots of Pop music. He is currently achieving chart success as a singer in his own right.

Unpredictable, unusual shifts in direction are McLaren's forte. Having exploited grass roots culture in the album 'Duck Rock', his next move was a raid in the opposite direction: he utilized high culture - ie Opera - for the purposes of Pop music.

Some of McLaren's ideas and the themes found in the songs of his groups derived from the Situationist International. The Situationists were an alliance of radical European artists, architects and poets who met irregularly between 1957 and 1972 and who published various magazines and manifestoes. Situationist theory, a heady mixture of avant garde, anarchist and Marxist ideas, was essentially a kind of intellectual terrorism. The Situationists undertook a total critique of everyday life in Western industrial capitalism; their aim was to reinvent revolution. During the events of May 1968 the students of Paris momentarily put their theories into practice. For a brief period McLaren was himself a member of the English Situationist group calling itself 'King Mob'.

Let us itemize various Situationist ideas which McLaren employed:

(1) the construction of situations, that is, overcoming passivity, making things happen, introducing creativity and play into everyday life. McLaren successfully stage managed numerous events which, once they attracted the attention of the mass media, became 'news'.

(2) Detournement, that is, the re-use of existing material in such a way as to alter or invert its meaning. This technique was often applied by Situationists to the images and slogans of advertising. Reid's graphics for the Sex Pistols followed the same pattern. Furthermore, the Punk style as a whole can be characterised in terms of a collage aesthetic which involved the recombination of elements in ways which transformed their original meanings.

(3) Never work, demolition of the work ethic. Punk echoed this attitude and Bow Wow Wow devoted a song to the subject ('W.O.R.K.'). (As a consequence of the age of mass unemployment the slogan 'never work' has acquired a bitter, negative connotation.)

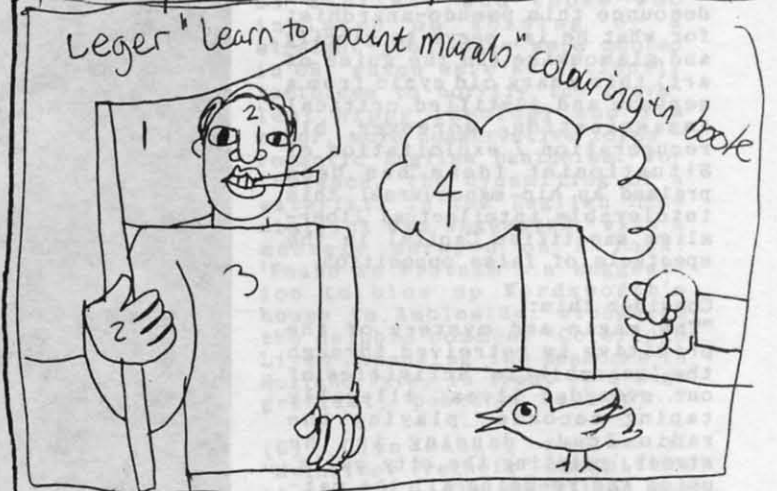
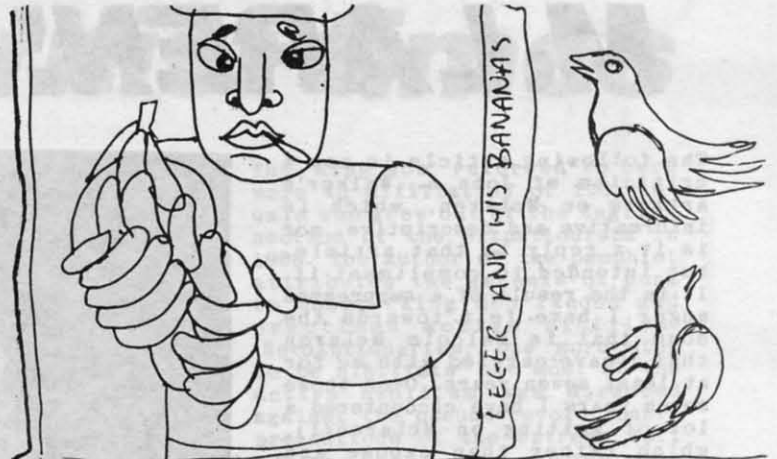
(4) Society of the spectacle: the world of consumer goods, tourism and mass media turns people into passive consumers. The Sex Pistols poured scorn upon holidays in the sun and upon fast food products. They also encouraged the young to become producers of culture rather than consumers of it. Punk rock was so basic anyone could do it; it was 'do it yourself' music.

(5) Critique of bourgeois attitudes and values, the use of shock tactics to offend and disrupt official culture. The Sex Pistols caused scandals on TV by their disregard of good manners and conventions, they exploited record companies, insulted audiences, exposed Pop music as a swindle, celebrated individuals such as bank robbers normally regarded as anti-social criminals. Their attacks on the British monarchy during the Queen's 1977 Jubilee year placed them in the vanguard of the left-wing opposition to such mystification.

Although Situationist ideas were influential it should be remembered that other factors stemming from the specifically British / American context also contributed to the character of Punk. For example, Reid's graphics were influenced not only by Situationist imagery but also by the acid flavours made fashionable by Pop artists such as Andy Warhol and by the lettering of ransom notes reproduced in the English popular press.

In response to criticism of her style of dress, a Punk cited the precedent of Kurt Schwitters' Merz collages. This example demonstrates that Punk was not simply an unconscious grass roots revolt. As we have seen, artistic influences from various sources helped to form it. Fred Vermorel, in his history of the Sex Pistols, goes further, he claims "the Sex Pistols was a work of art". Vermorel's opinion seems to be confirmed by the fact that the Victoria and Albert Museum in London has purchased Reid's Sex Pistols graphics for £1,000. (They are stored in the V. & A. pending the opening of a Theatre Museum in Covent Garden.) Visually speaking Punk was a highly original style. However, it would be false to the total, mixed-media, cultural event that was the Sex Pistols to discuss the visual aspect in isolation. Histories of the traditional arts tend to be based upon differentiation by medium (painting, sculpture, etc). Such histories, it is clear, cannot cope with modern works using a variety of media, works which are in part the creation of the mass media, and works which are the result of cross-over.

(This is an extract from a book in progress on the relationship between the visual fine arts and Pop music.)



**TRANSMISSION**  
 IS BACK! WITH -  
**MAY 4<sup>th</sup> I CONOCLASM** <sup>Till</sup> **MAY 25<sup>th</sup>**  
 13 Chisholm St. Trongate

Paintings By MALCOLM Peter Gordon  
 + DRAWINGS By DICKSON THOMSON MUIR

# McLAREN: The slag of

The following article is not a criticism of John A. Walker's article on McLaren, which is informative and descriptive, nor is it a reply to that article, but intended to compliment it. It is the result of a suppressed anger I have felt towards the scum that is Malcolm McLaren that I have carried with me for at least seven years. Over those seven years I have encountered a lot of writing on McLaren(1), which rather than expose and denounce this pseudo-anarchist for what he is, serve to glorify and glamourise (in the guise of art) this weary old cynic from a serious and justified critical assassination. Moreover, his recuperation / exploitation of Situationist ideas has been praised as hip manoeuvres: this intolerable intellectual liberalism sanctifies Capital in the spectacle of false opposition.

Consider this:

"The magic and mystery of the primitive is retrieved through the 'anarchistic' activities of our everyday lives: illegally taping records, playing the radio loud, dancing in the street, painting the city walls, using and re-using all the materials available to us from the past, present and future. The ghetto blaster symbolises this process of appropriation: the most modern form of technology, it bears the marks and inscriptions (bricolage) of historical cultures from all over the world. The photo on the album's back cover of a Zulu woman carrying the ghetto blaster on her head, as she would normally carry a jug of water, is surely one of the most blissful images of the last decade."(2)

It is absolutely astonishing how titillated intellectuals are by the most banal and flatulent motions, which pretending to be radical chic is really narcissistic self-indulgence which far from subverting daily life under CAPITALISM, or change social relations, or even how we look at the world, merely trivialise radical coherence and mediate rebellion through a dirge of commodities (records, trends, magazines, subcultures, films); take a look at Derek Jarman's "Jubilee" or the equally appalling "The Great Rock and Roll Swindle" as examples in the 'Punk' genre(3). As for the boring old fart himself, Malcolm McLaren, the only struggle he is involved in is the struggle of capitalist imperialism to find ever newer areas of lucrative exploitation. He promotes the idea that anything can be used ('appropriated' is the arty name for it) without ever apologising along the way. This cultural promiscuity has been mistaken for a 'post-political



**McLAREN**



**THE SEX PISTOLS ARE AN ATTITUDE. NOT A BAND.**



approach to culture' whatever that may mean. He is the best of businessmen: he's hip, but a real fucking square, where there's a buck involved Malcy will be there, wanking his ego all over it. If you think Andrew Preston talks rubbish, then listen to it from the horse's mouth;

"Here, on the street, when you don't have a dime in your pocket, and you don't possess anything, the one thing you own is your body, so make it powerful and important. Customising it, personalising it and doing the same to your artifacts around you. Oh yes, fashion does speak with passion. We have begun to remember to think with our hips and not our heads."(4)

Good words from a millionaire which mean "Buy my product" and even less subtly "Don't think. Consume!" McLaren is the slag of these post-modern times. He is characteristic of the sickness of those who use an impoverished and sebased language to recommend radical renewal of society, by his adoption of a radical stance (the Situationist perspective and the supercession it conceals) in the interests of Power, strengthens the very power of the established order he falsely claims he is trying to break. Any real break from the established order, however, would necessarily entail a break from his role as a hip-capitalist entrepreneur. It's all firmly and securely rapped in the dominant IDEOLOGY. McLaren is not alone; there are many individuals with past Situationist associations who are now firmly on the side of REACTION - Fred Vermorel, Chris Gray, Jamie Reid.

"This form of hip capitalism coming from the overt recuperation of a bowdlerised Situationist critique in the U.K. was really the capitalizing of deceased active nihilism inherent in the activities of King Mob continuing to exist as a nostalgic, dearly-loved memory, static and un-self critical. In the case of punk, returning active nihilism to a consumed passive nihilism via rock venues."(5)

It is amusing to hear how people still refer to punk, some spell it with a capital 'P', some talk of the punk tradition. This insipid disease has parallels in the artworld too, and people like Kathy Acker, PattiSmith and the whole bohemian ghetto are acquiring spiky random haircuts and sticking safety pins through their heads in a miserable attempt at street credibility.



# Post-Modernist times

"Thus Mulheimer Freiheit, six German artists, dispossessed consumers of culture, having 'no heroes' and 'no future' and holding nothing sacred...form a 'group without ideology' engaged in semiotic guerilla warfare." (6)

It should be noted that some of these artists sell their 'works' to Doris and Charles Saatchi (collectors / manufacturers of new painting) who also happen to be the advertising agency that masterminded the Tory Party campaign in the past two general elections.

Punk, as is explained in the "End of Music" booklet, did not produce an active revolt against the musical spectacle but merely the urge to update it. The sooner we forget the antics of those servile little morons that were the sex Pistols, then the quicker we can proceed with some real destruction of such spectacles (The Jesus and Mary Chain take note). A few final words on McLaren: when confronted with the name, let the words of Julie Birchill and Tony Parsons ring in your head; "The purpose of this merchandise is to rub your face in the dirt and win your wallet at the same time." (7) If you ever meet him, take an example from Valerie Solanis, iconoclastic authoress of the brilliant and deranged "Scum Manifesto", when she met that other faeces of culture, Andy Warhol. She shot him.

Calum McIntyre.

(1) Apart from the music press, other writing on McLaren has appeared in ZG "Desire" issue, "Art and Text" 11, and he has even had the privilege of an hour long pat on the head from that constant drone of an arts programme, "The South Bank Show".

(2) Andrew Preston reviewing "Duck Rock" in "Art and Text" no. 11.

(3) If I'm not mistaken, Julain Temple, filmmaker of "Swindle" is currently working on a revolutionary rock opera called "Out of the 29th Century".

(4) Malcolm McLaren, a message to "Art and Text" readers, Number 11.

(5) "The End of Music" pamphlet. As the writer of the piece has disowned it, he shall remain anonymous. The publishers of the pamphlet were Calderwood 15, Glasgow. Other stuff of interest here are "Refuse" by Nick Brandt, available from BM Combustion, London WC1 X., and "Like a Summer with a Thousand Julys", which deals mainly with the riots of 1981, available from most radical bookshops.



AS THE ONLY GUY WITH ANY BIT OF ANARCHY LEFT"



The 'King Mob' referred to here were an affiliation of individuals who grew out of the English section of the Situationists in 1968. The author of the pamphlet attributes the genesis of punk to them; "King Mob lauded and practised active nihilism. 'Revolutionaries, one more step to be nihilists' but most of the active nihilism was directed against the pseudo-revolutionary pretensions of the extreme left of capital, and those who insisted on abiding by a straight job...Ideas were mooted in '68, which were sufficiently tasteless to horrify the prevalent hippy ideology and its older, more conservative forms - romantic English pantheism. For instance, the dynamiting of a waterfall in the English Lake district was suggested, with a message sprayed on a rock: 'Peace in Vietnam'...a suggestion to blow up Wordsworth's house in Ambleside, alongside the delphic comment 'Coleridge Lives'...hanging the peacocks in Holland Park, in front of a huge graffiti, 'peacocks is dead'..."

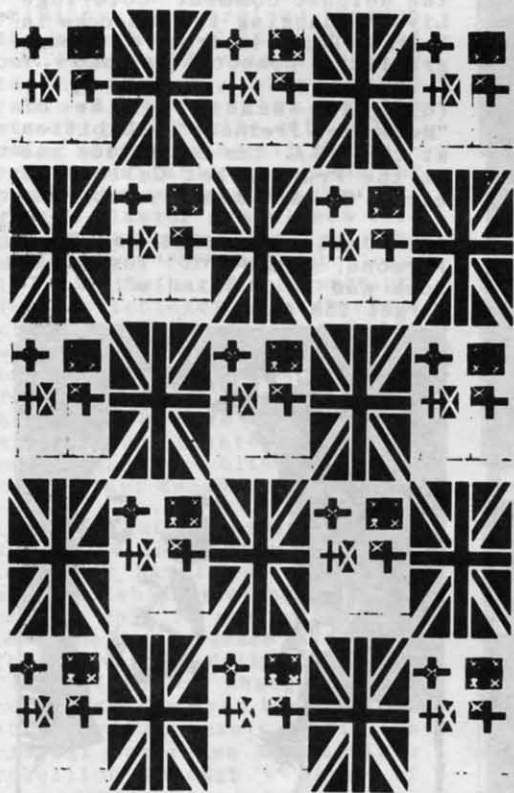
(6) Glyn Banks, review of "Mulheimer Freiheit" exhibition at the I.C.A. The exhibition was at the Fruitmarket Gallery in early '84. Art Monthly Feb. '84

(7) Julie Birchill and Tony Parsons, review of "The Great Rock and Roll Swindle". N.M.E. Forget the date.



# COERCIVE ART

# MAKING Images Speak Their Silences.



Uncertain Union

Images and stories (advertising hoardings, films, television programmes and commercials, newspaper and magazine articles) set us in place as social actors, make assumptions about who we are, what is "natural" behaviour, and what it is "natural" to think about a whole range of questions; how the economy should be organized; how our children should be educated; how we should view foreigners; the role women should play; and so on.

Overwhelmingly these images and stories construct us into roles by denying and suppressing alternative roles and ways of understanding the world. In other words the dominant images contain implicitly within themselves vast areas of silence which, if broken, would call in question the integrity and validity of these images.

It is a common experience for those who regard themselves as "on the left" to experience the range of dominant images as a form of madness, so perversely other is the world-therein constructed.

Several options are open when faced with the all-pervasiveness of the dominant ideologies and images. An obvious option is to seek to construct popular alternative images, to retrieve and define alternative ways of constructing the world. Distinguished examples exist in various art forms and practices: 7.84's work in theatre; C4's Friday Alternative in television; the regrettably short-lived Seven Days in journalism, and so on. Another option, much favoured in the plastic arts, is forms of modernism which principally foreground the process of art as construction within a particular medium or practice rather than as representation of the real world. Both of these options have considerable strengths and are clearly appropriate in particular contexts. However, they have their own potential limitations. The chief of these, with regard to forms of modernism, is a tendency towards coterie art, at its best serving as a Research and Development practice for other artists, at its worst expressing a wilful elitism and obscurantism. The potential limitation of popular alternatives to dominant images and ideologies is precisely an uncertainty as to how to negotiate the balance between analysis and pleasure in individual works, a tendency, at the end of the day, to leave the Devil with all the best tunes.

The works offered in this exhibition are a response to this dilemma: is it possible to deliver all the pleasures of dominant art forms and at the same time ensure they do not speak reactionary ideologies? The technique employed is to present the dominant imagery in all its seductiveness but, through a process of montage, probe its repressions, literally force it to speak its silences.

**SILENCES**  
POSTCARD MONTAGES BY  
**COLIN McARTHUR**

Exhibition is at the Collective Gallery, Edinburgh until the end of May.



## ON THE WRITINGS OF

# RAOUL VANEIGEM



*The Book of Pleasures* is easy to read, but difficult to review, especially if a reviewer pays serious attention to the author's warning, "Keep away, serious critics! This is not for you. I don't give a toss what you think of this book".

Well, I'm no serious critic and I'm in complete accord with all the ideas in the book, so expect no petty haggling over this or that point, no damning with faint praise or any other of the critics usual catalogue of tricks. Instead I simply urge you to read this book as soon as you can and put its ideas into practice immediately. In the author's words, "If you know all this and better, go to it!".

The book's greatest pleasure is its language. For too many years Situationist writing has laboured against a (well-deserved) reputation of being difficult to understand, if not virtual impenetrability. A body of theory as rigorous and demanding as Situationism requires an equally rigorous language, especially in its attempts to break through the sophistry and solipsism that cloaks so much 'radical' ideology. All the same, it's regretted that many, myself included, have often closed the pages of Situationist books and pamphlets with dazed incomprehension.

Reading *The Book of Pleasures* is easy. If nothing else it is a modern example of impassioned, visionary prose in the tradition of Blake, Rimbaud and Lautreamont. Passion unties Situationism's tongue. Here

praise is due to the translator, John Fullerton. From the first sentence the reader is borne along by Vaneigem's anger and impatience, emotions which illuminate rather than cloud his desire for a world of intense pleasure and which fuel his contempt for this present order of work, restraint and survival.

But this is no 'Hedonism Revisited'. Vaneigem is not another revolutionary deserting the barricades for the boozier and bed. For him, and for me, our choice now lies between death via work and constraint or life via unlimited creative pleasure. We seek a radically new society. Anything less leads straight to the gates of the universal factory. In these days, the unknown wonders of life emancipated cannot be found within the offices of the official revolution. The end, or reversal, of this world begins with the individuals' irreducible subjectivity, here work and submission meet implacable opposition. Here from the individuals' will to live springs "a world in becoming", while the old world "Goes down skid row very well on its own". Leave things alone. Cease work. Each time you work you destroy yourself. Attempt instead to live, follow temptations, do not worry over consequences. "The revolution will be a gathering of speed as the living race towards life. Then we will see if such a tiderace leaves the stucco walls of hierarchy, state and commodity civilisation standing".

Indeed, the domination of exchange over life will be broken by realising our desires, it cannot withstand the innocence which quietly urges us to laze in bed rather than clock in at work, to ridicule leaders, to refuse to pay. From such urges, multiplied a million times, will come the society that "millions of people feel a deep down attraction for. A society

without punishment to fear, bills to honour, pleasures to pay for, without power, frustration or submission".

This world cannot be ushered in by revolutionary militants and intellectuals, the management in the wings. How could it be? What part can they play? They have too much at stake in the present order. Their diktats to work have resulted already in too much blood and suffering. No, it will come from those who turn their back on revolutionary work, refusing to put off for one day longer their real desires, to make one more sacrifice to the future, seeking instead their own lives of independence and creativity. This is what we all wish, now is the time to begin.

*The Book of Pleasures* is a good place to start. No doubt this book will be greeted with the deafening silence that 'radicals' usually reserve for Situationist ideas. No matter. Situationism does not seek shelf-space in the ideological supermarket, preferring instead to simply state the obvious.

Of course, there are those who wouldn't recognise the obvious if it were lying next to them in bed.

Clifford Harper

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*A reprint of 'Revolution of Everyday Life' is due in early 1985. There will be a price increase to £3.60 with that edition.*

Trade:

A DISTRIBUTION  
HOUSMANS

# Marjory Allthorpe-Guyton. Interview

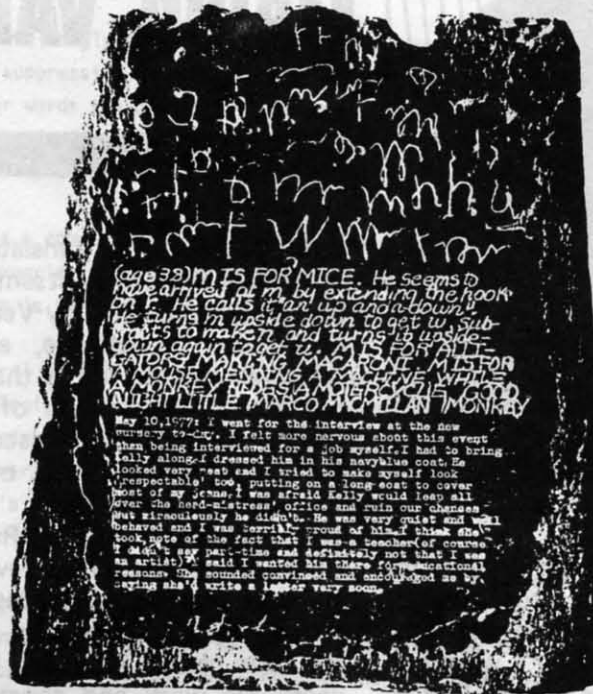
interviewed by Simon Brown, Malcolm Dickson and Ian Brotherhood. 8th, February, 1985.

M.D. In your lecture "War & Sex: Alternative Media" (given at the Royal Scottish Academy Library, 7/2/85) you talked about how artists working in alternative media (performance, video, film, slide etc) approach the problems of politics and sexuality. Could you re-iterate the principal point of that lecture?

M.A.-G. I don't think the point was clear. It wasn't!

M.D. Well, for the benefit of those who weren't there.

M.A.-G. What I was trying to do was not to present my own argument but to try and lay open some of the issues the artists are dealing with and a lot of those ideas come from French writers such as Foucault. I've very briefly summarised what I felt to be the main planks in his argument in his book on sexuality. And it is very difficult because he relates this idea of sex with power, and it is not clear how you can do that, but I think his approach - which isn't that of a sociologist or a historian - he's more like a poet, and if you read his writing, it is very difficult sometimes. It eludes meaning, it's not direct; he's been called a sort of mythic writer. So far as I could see, what he was doing was praising all the -what he calls - discourses; the institutions, the practices which are concentrated so obsessively on sexuality from the 18th Century. He attempted to pin down this area of human behaviour which other cultures would regard as a kind of mystery, because these discourses saw it as a kind of Holy Grail, a path to what is a true state/condition of Man, and therefore they wanted to control it, to know it; the idea that knowledge equals power. What he was doing (in the first reading) was to analyse how those discourses which attempt to control this area, and to make an analogy between how these discourses worked with that subject and how other discourses work in other areas (?): to make a kind of paradigm for exists: now the role of women is subscribed by or constrained by, the medical profession, by education. I mean a woman's role as a child-bearer, as a mother, or whatever. Her own self-determination is negated by all the things that society does to order it; which is what Mary Kelly's work in the British Art Show is all about. She tried to (I won't go into her work in detail) live her experiences as a new mother, and in another way, explain it in this Lacanian psychoanalysis: there's a lot about castration theory and symbolic order and all this which is in Lacan - and to come up with the conclusion that the feminine seems a negative thing.



MARY KELLY  
POST-PARTUM DOCUMENT  
DOCUMENTATION  
PRE-WRITING ALPHABET  
EXERCISE AND DIARY  
1979  
resin and slate  
15 units 20.3 x 25.3

That was what that work was about ("Post-Partum Document..."). What Foucault does is...that the situation of power as ordained from above - the State controls the individual - is not what he's getting at, but he's saying that power is everywhere, in relationships, from the smallest dialogue between two individuals, in a family...

S.B. That power is in the grammar of the relationship rather than...?

M.A.-G. Yes. It's a kind of syntax of life, and that is a relationship and the ultimate of control and power, the dynamics of it are brought to their fulfilment, or ultimate end in war. That's the two poles of the whole thing. That was my reading of that, and I suppose I ended with im Head's tableau which he then photographed, because on a superficial level it had all the sexual toys and things in it. But they all seemed clearly visual metaphors for the armaments industry. It may seem a bit banal the analogy, it was pretty clear. That's why I ended on that work, its obviously a concern of his. But I didn't mention Hans Haacke who's been dealing with this subject in his work for a long time, 20 odd years or so.

S.B. You're talking about power, power and women. A number of people complained that there was a lack of work by feminist artists or work containing a feminist viewpoint in the British Art Show.

M.A.-G. That's true.

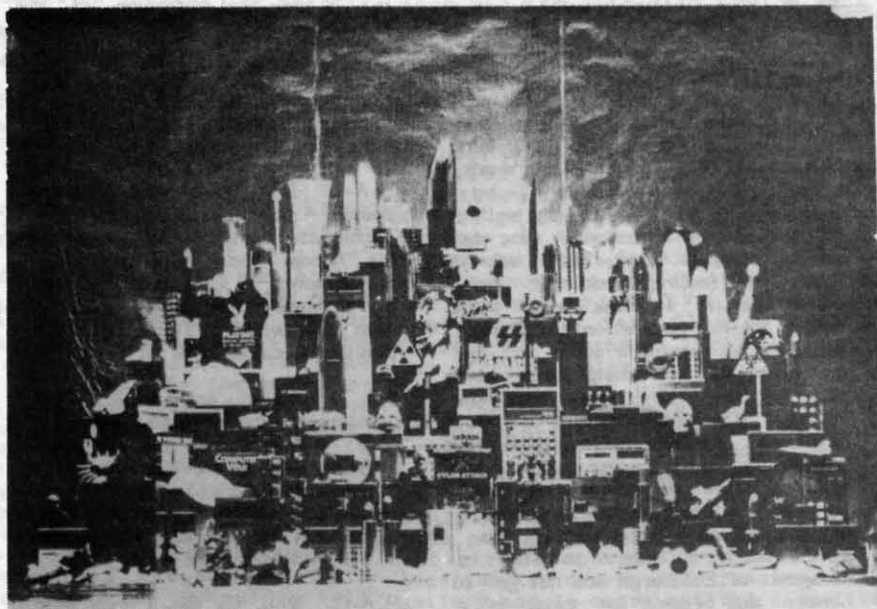
S.B. Is this because you didn't find any? Or other reasons?

M.A.-G. It's not that exactly. There was one of us, Jon Thomson, who is very aware of feminist art practices. He knows the practitioners very well, on the whole, and I saw quite a lot of work. But in a sense, the show is a travelling exhibition, it deals in a very conventional sense with objects, with finished works of art. It's a practical problem with this kind of exhibition. It is very old-fashioned in that sense. Feminist art practice doesn't necessarily work towards a finished product. The work is in the enquiry, to show the enquiry in its various stages. Sometimes it's a time-based work; there isn't a final hermeneutic product and so the work itself is difficult to accommodate, though we could have done it, we just decided not to, which may be our failing in the show.

M.D. How would the term Post-Modnism fit in all this - it seemed relevant to what you talked about in your lecture "War & Sex"?

M.A.-G. This new plurality?

M.D. Yes. Also this shift towards artists becoming their own theorists. Do you see this as a trend, and do you welcome it?



M.A-G. Yes, but I don't know whether it is a very healthy thing or not in some ways, because when you introduce theory you tend to find one or two people set up as gurus. Foucault, for example, and Baudrillard, have been taken up and perhaps misunderstood or half-understood. They are very complex. Foucault is a very complex thinker, and it's easy to crystallise their ideas when they're not really there. You can't do that sometimes. The ideas are kind of open-ended, that is part of his point. And it's dangerous for artists who obviously haven't had his learning; they are not in the position to have the kind of synthetic mind that he had, to take his ideas wholesale. And sometimes they are second-hand; they read bits in Art Monthly or whatever, of particular critics, and it goes down like a dollop of syrup and then comes out. He's been taken up by left because of this idea of power and the ideas seemed to have polarized so that Foucault's stand is taken to be a very radical, left-wing one. But it's not necessarily so with him....But, on the other hand, because I believe that art should engage politically and be some kind of moving force for social change, that is the plus side.

S.B. You're saying that art should engage politically and quite a lot of the work in the show is obviously politically engaged. There's an irony in this in that the show is being financed by Citibank, by BP, and by the Government. Do you think this situation can continue, what with the appointment of Lord Gowrie, a rather right-wing individual, on the Arts Council? Do you think the Arts Council policy will change, to clamp down a little...?

M.A-G. On radical art, performance...?

S.B. ...or do you think that's a kind of harmless way of the Government appearing to be liberal?

M.A-G. I think that is quite likely. And in fact we know this from American Modernism, that it was totally absorbed by a reactionary regime, and the same will happen here, or has up till now. There are exceptions: the Pentonville Gallery for instance, when the GLC goes, I can't imagine whatever replaces the GLC once it is split into Boroughs.. There is very little money or finance available from other sources. The Elephant Trust supports certain radical publications. I haven't much experienced the financing. My work up to now has been within the established body, so far as I'm being paid by local government, or being paid by the Arts Council. How do you get resources to finance the stuff which could be politically unacceptable...?

S.B. I'm surprised that the government continues to finance the arts to the extent that it does. It seems a way of neutralising contentious material...

M.A-G. Yes. When Gowrie went round the exhibition (at the Ikon Gallery in B-ham.) he's sharp enough to know what some of these works are (in the "Critical Attitudes" section) and he made a kind of wry comment about it in his opening speech which was quite clear that he's informed enough to 'content' some of this work. But it's simply not a political issue for them at the moment.

I.B. Do you think that art can really involve itself in politics and remain as art; retain its purity, its essence as art?

M.A-G. I don't think it can. There are exceptions. I mentioned in my lecture, Rivera and Orozco, the Mexican muralists; but they suffered for it. Grosz in Germany suffered for it. They produce great works themselves. It's rare, but it does happen, but to retain whatever you call art, and to effect change

directly, I don't think is possible, very easily.

M.D. What about an artist like Conrad Atkinson?

M.A-G. He is sort of England's acceptable political artist. He has been represented in Arts Council exhibitions; he has been absorbed by the establishment...

S.B. Did you start off with the intention that the British Art Show would influence the future direction of art?

M.A-G. Yes, I think we were that presumptuous...Although we compromised to some extent by including work which has been around for a long time, but we felt it had qualities which were part of the direction we would hold... Have you any objections to some of the work, by exclusion or inclusion...? Do you think that Conrad should have been in the show, some of the performance I mentioned, Andre Stitt, for example. Have you seen any of his work?

M.D. I've read a bit on him but I haven't seen any of his work.

M.A-G. He's much more politically engaged; he talked of art being a "fucking hammer", and that's what he is as an artist.

M.D. I think there were a few notable exclusions in that respect: the area Conrad Atkinson is working in. I also expected an artist like Rose Garrard to be included. She is, after all, the heroine of feminine art practice.

M.A-G. Yes. We thought long and hard about her.

M.D. I think it's an objective survey of what's going on. But I think there's a tendency for some of the more radical aspects to be accommodated within the overall liberalness of the show.

S.B. A kind of repressive tolerance.

M.A-G. You what! Is that Marcuse?

S.B. Yes. Who selected the selectors?

M.A-G. There are probably some things I don't know about this...I was merely asked if I would like to do the show and I went along and talked to the Arts Council Department people...I'm not sure how we were selected, but maybe Sandy Moffat or Jon (Thomson) - the other two selectors - might know more; we don't actually talk about it... we are quite coy about that.

M.D.P. In your lecture "Scottish Art: Keeper of the Flame" (delivered at Glasgow School of Art, 8/2/85), that title didn't have much bearing on what you talked about. You mentioned the work of Steven Campbell; you seemed to criticise him for his lack of political engagement.

M.A-G. The title of that lecture was

something that just came to me, I tried to explain that in the course of the lecture. I suppose I was looking for a new kind of History Painting, a Beckmann again, with that kind of force, content. There is a great human content in Campbell's work, but for the reasons I went into today, it is not for the reasons I would regard as 'keeping the flame alight'. There are all these other elements, such as the commodity fetish, the market force influences which have rapidly consumed his work in New York. When I first came to Scotland in connection with this exhibition, two things struck me: the country has very rich past which none of the work seemed to engage in at all. Even the well-known Scottish painters. There's still this French influence, the colourists...

S.B. Unlike John Bellany...?

M.A-G. He's the only one who seems to have a feeling for his country, for me, and I was looking for that, and I didn't find it in anyone except Bellany... And the other thing was: apart from a very rich Scottish history, it's a bloody and tormented pat. I know the North-East a bit, Caithness, all the Land Clearances, and now it's equally tough because of industries folding, post-industrial decay etc.

S.B. Writers are more aware of this.

M.A-G. Yes, Scottish poets, and filmmakers. I didn't find it in painting and I was disappointed.

I.B. Perhaps the problem is that art cannot talk about these problems...that it can't take on sexuality, religion etc., which justify Rheinhardt's dogmatic insistence that art as art is all that matters. Perhaps that is the reality of art, that it can't talk about anything except itself.

M.A-G. But you talked about religion. Art and religion have been so close, they have been, in the past, almost the same language.

S.B. And in the recent past artists have taken on political themes.

M.D. Art can be politically engaged, and it can engage itself with the history of Scotland. To cite an example; only a few weeks ago I saw Peter Watkins' film "Culloden" and Ian Wyses' "Fall From Grace", which deal with assumptions about an historical event in a critical way. As for art, Peter Seddon's paintings and drawings take as their theme the Highland Clearances.

M.A-G. You've got to feel!...The younger generation haven't experienced those sufferings. You just can't say; I'll take as my theme the Highland Clearances. You have to have something in you; it has to grow from experience. It demands an enormous imaginative faculty to do that...I think you can engage in those experiences, which I assume Kiefer is doing in his work; trying to come to terms with the

past that has been completely negated in the minds of younger people. I had, in my upbringing/schooling no real education about either of the two World Wars. I only realized what the 2nd World War was all about when I came across a letter from a dead uncle. He wrote in pencil this note to his mother from the Thailand railway where all those men died; and it was so moving, this poignant note saying "I'm alright, Mum, don't worry", in capital letters - he obviously couldn't write very well. He died shortly afterwards. He was about 24 years old. That was my first real feeling about the 2nd World War... I think what some artists of my generation are trying to do is to recapture some of the memories of something they never experienced. They want to know, because it seems important to know now that we are facing something potentially much worse. This is what I tried to indicate in the lecture: although I could see that in Scotland, for these painters to have much success, to stay in Glasgow or Edinburgh and not go to London and become fat cats, is a great thing. But, on the other hand, I was looking for something else initially. I suppose, in a way, I felt that if you live in London, or are a Londoner, the city is so big, the influences are so varied: the work you come up with is more likely to be influenced by current fashion and ideas and not to do with anything deep within you. I feel that out of London there is a chance for a smaller space to create...a more 'freeing' environment.

S.B. I think there is more chance of being fed by something other than art.

M.D. the question that has got to be asked is whether art is a valid area of activity.

M.A-G. I think that's why Bruce McLean realized that you can't paint anything without a host of influences, you can't be free of it. And I suppose that's why he just attacks all the time, to get it down to cut out the tradition that weighs

on you like a ton of bricks. But I think that painting will always have potential, because the "stuff" of painting is a physical thing. There's something in it, using it, it's a very real extension of the human body, in a way: it is a very primal thing. That is why painting is different to writing.

S.B. It is much more immediate, much more sensuous.

M.A-G. It's part of you. That's why people paint with their hands. Those late Goya's were painted with his hands, that's why they remind me so much of Campbell, although I don't know whether he does paint with his hands. There is hope for painting because it is so elemental.

S.B. What you are saying is that painting is irreplaceable.

M.A-G. Yes

M.D. What would you expect students to get out of the exhibition...What is the message there?

M.A-G. Well, for me, I hope that it would show them not to be browbeaten into a particular dogma...My message to students would be to just try and see yourself in the context of the time; what's in now won't be tomorrow. So what you want to do even if it's not the 'thing' now, and just try and assess your own position.

M.D. What do you envisage in the next few years... I mean, are you confident, or are you shit-scared, like us?

M.A-G. I think I'm a bit pessimistic, because I'm afraid art will become even more marginalised as social conditions deteriorate further. Even my own 'raison d'être' the work that I do is becoming less and less justified when you see the famine in Africa. Living in the West is becoming more and more of an indulgence, that may sound a bit pious, but it is difficult to live with: art openings in Cork Street, getting an article into Art Monthly, it's a bit banal really. Perhaps I'll become a missionary but I don't think I've got that amount of piety.

# TRANSMISSION S.O.S

After almost a year of preparation the property that was to become the "Transmission" Gallery opened in December 1983 with an exhibition called "Urban Life". A year before eight Glasgow artists decided to attempt to establish an alternative exhibition venue in the city. The main aim in setting up Transmission was to provide a gallery in Scotland which was run by young artists for young artists. The preparation I speak of was that of bringing together around thirty artists who could agree to a constitution and artistic policy and then go about the business of electing a steering-committee to seek funding and organise the renovation of the premises that had already been found. The property that was to become Transmission was a dingy, run-down shop in Chisholm Street in the East End of the city centre, and with the help of a local surveyor, Tom Lawrie, the steering-committee managed to negotiate the first year rent-free. Due to the gallery's geographical position in the city, the steering-committee hoped to stimulate the awareness of that area's working-class to contemporary art and thereby make a positive contribution to the East End of Glasgow. To that end, such an intention was included in the artistic policy of Transmission. Although laying themselves open to the accusation of being patronising, the members of the steering-committee were

sincere in adopting many such admirable pledges. In retrospect, it is obvious that we were naive in believing that each member of the steering-committee could continue to produce art themselves, assist in keeping the gallery functioning and achieve all the laudable intentions of the artistic policy. At least we were naive in expecting we could all do this without the active support of Glasgow's artistic community and a greater financial commitment from the District Council and the Scottish Arts Council.

After completing the renovation work, with the help of a contribution of paint from 'Dulux' worth five hundred pounds, Transmission's exhibition programme began with "Urban Life". This exhibition was selected from a submission by the general membership of the 'Committee for the Visual Arts', the grey name being picked by the steering-committee. The choice was made by three members of the C.V.A. "Urban Life" proved to be a mixed show both in styles and quality, however it did what no other gallery in Scotland had done at that time; show the work of some 25 young artists in one exciting exhibition. The opening was an optimistic affair, with the Art School, Arts Council and the local community well represented. It was so well attended that at times it was difficult to move - most who were there were supportive although, as always, some were there merely to confirm the reservations they'd had since they were first aware of the venture, and some were there to criticise because they always criticise. Sandy Moffat, the Glasgow School of Art Drawing and Painting lecturer, opened the exhibition with an encouraging speech and Glasgow and Scotland's Art community generally seemed to be enthusiastic about the whole concept of this new artist-run gallery.

In the eleven months that followed, the C.V.A., in spite of the limitations forced on it by its lack of financial resources and the size of the gallery itself, staged a series of varied and exciting exhibitions - exhibitions, which in my opinion, although never pleasing everyone were always interesting enough for the C.V.A. to expect visitors to return once they'd seen the show in Transmission.

In that time there were many tasks to be carried out, particularly by the steering-committee: fortnightly meetings to decide on future exhibitions, look at slide applications from prospective members and to deal generally with District Council, Arts Council and future policy. However, as important as all this work the main, and perhaps most difficult business was trying to ensure that Transmission was open six hours a day for five days a week. This had to be done by staffing the gallery with the voluntary work of the membership itself, and fortunately the premises were open most of the time.

During those eleven months, the C.V.A. managed to initiate links with artists-organised galleries and groups in England and Northern Ireland and this fact is encouraging for the future of Transmission. In that time enthusiasm amongst the membership of the C.V.A. sometimes flagged and then was rekindled, there were a few resignations and these people were replaced by new artists. The steering-committee was also undoubtedly misled by a few opportunists whose main interest was in gaining from without contributing to Transmission. Throughout all this change, however, morale amongst everyone involved was generally high.

One serious problem which emerged, and which I think remains insurmountable, was how to administer the day-to-day organisation of a gallery without a full-time gallery-manager. The C.V.A. were and are unable to employ such a person, and I think that ultimately this was the reason why Transmission was closed from November 1984 until May 1985. I also think that until the C.V.A. can employ a gallery-manager, Transmission's future will remain in doubt, no matter how dedicated and selfless the members of its steering-committee are. The physical reason as to the gallery's closure during this period, was due to a sewage leak in the basement, although, in my opinion, the real reason was because there was no-one employed by the C.V.A. to make sure that it didn't take Glasgow District Council six months to locate and repair the offending pipe.

The ideal organisational base for an artists-run gallery such as Transmission, is a steering-committee made up of artists who make all the decisions relating to artistic policy, exhibitions, hanging etc., and a full-time paid gallery manager. The gallery-manager's responsibility would be to organise the day-to-day running of the gallery and to carry out the directives given he or she by the steering-committee. The question of whether or not the gallery-manager should have a place on that steering-committee would be up to individual galleries. To a local artist-run gallery to employ such a person, a sound financial situation would have to be allied to the good intent and organisational and creative skills of those involved in the gallery. A budget would have to be sought which would allow considerably more to be spent on each show than, for instance, the amount Transmission currently spends on each show. That figure is around sixty pounds, which is stretched to cover advertising (posters, invites, postage etc.) as well as refreshments for the opening and also screws, mirror-plates etc., to fix work to the walls. Transmission's financial situation is perfectly illustrated by the fact that to date the telephone in the gallery has still to be connected. What other gallery operates without a telephone? The existing grant Transmission receives from the Scottish Arts Council is totally inadequate for any committee to have ambitious and far-reaching aims. With severely limited resources it is futile to plan for exhibitions which would prove even moderately costly: video, installations, film, open competitions. It is also pointless in attempting to arrange reciprocal shows with other groups in England or abroad or to try to bring shows from other parts of the country, due to these financial restraints. This fact was highlighted when the C.V.A. was forced to cancel an exhibition by a group of English artists (Bristol Black Arts Group) when it was realised that to pay the £150 necessary to enable the show to go on, would have meant endangering the carefully worked-out budget.

Despite Transmission's steering-committee making their views clear regarding the position of a paid gallery-manager, it seems that the Scottish Arts Council feel they cannot make such a financial commitment to the C.V.A. This suggests that the members of Transmission's new committee must continue spending time on fund-raising ventures: dances, lotteries, jumble-sales and trying to charm businessmen and councillors. All this, of course, has nothing to do with the business of creating art and organising exhibitions, it is simply artist as

unpaid administrator, as money-making entrepreneur. This situation is merely a microcosm of what is happening throughout the Arts and the country generally, and grandiose titles like "The Glory of the Garden" and the "Five Year Plan" cannot disguise simple Government philosophy - 'if it doesn't pay it doesn't deserve to survive'. The so-called de-centralisation simply disguises an attempt to delegate work to unpaid volunteers, and thereby destroying real jobs. This of course, leads on to a much wider discussion which I cannot deal with in this article.

In the light of the shrinking cuts that many small galleries in Scotland are suffering, it is vital that Transmission remains, even if that can only achieve fairly modest ambitions. Sadly, when one thinks of venues in Scotland where a young artist can reasonably expect to exhibit, there are only too few: "The Artists Collective" in Edinburgh, and possibly the "Compass Gallery" and the "369 Gallery" and the smaller of the two galleries at Aberdeen's "Artspace". As the last three of these galleries probably have fairly large waiting lists, every young artist in Scotland should take the opportunity to become involved in Transmission, where one can play an active part in the direction the gallery takes as well as exhibiting in it.

With "Mayfest" thriving, the need for the healthy growth of Transmission becomes all the more poignant so that it can become an integral part of the Glasgow Arts scene. For that to happen, everyone involved in that Glasgow Arts scene must actively support those who have been and are working hard to establish this young gallery. The support of, hopefully, the C.V.A.'s future membership, Art students, is particularly important.

Those 'important' and influential people (tutors, gallery administrators, Arts Council, and District Councillors) in the community who have in the past been guilty of failing to come to see exhibitions or ignoring openings should attempt to see Transmission's Mayfest exhibition which opened on May 7th. Continued support and hard work is then necessary to ensure that Transmission becomes a vital addition to Glasgow's galleries and not only survives but prospers.

ALISTAIR MAGEE.

# poetry.



## WHO IS MY MUSE WHERE IS MY LANDSCAPE

A pencil scraping on a line  
Graphite and a pulped tree

The body of the nude  
Myself  
become the image

But buried  
conjuring the figures  
from a pale ground

Two men Dark ash on chalk

The images exist to bring them back  
to soothe the fingers' memory  
the body's ache  
the hungry gap in the mind  
to make sense

But he grows thin with death/thinner  
the bones clanking against hollows  
Nothing left  
But the eye still burning  
A black flame  
The eye that was blue Bright bird  
You grin/death was your last trick  
the shrunken head squeezed out  
between railings  
and the drizzle of rain

Paint across the face  
Eyesockets outlined

Or the other looking outward/turned  
away from me into a quality of space  
sub-aqua  
underwater turned to air  
I sense water  
I don't know its green-ness/its blue  
the music of it/lapped sound  
like something reflected

I draw to bring them back  
But they have their own ways

What is seen is the surface  
The pencil scraping on a line  
Graphite and a pulped tree  
The body of the nude

At the end of the day glimpses  
of days thumbed like sunshine  
Morning with the names of light  
Mica silver/almost a grey thrown back  
from a cliff where snow scars  
gouged into the dark wall  
force it out against an eye seeing  
silhouette/a black shape  
The plateau top rolls over into  
the shadow of cloud/pushes out  
bellies the rock westward  
into this space we are

This corner/stone slab  
white wall  
a door

This place



This being here  
in weak sun/convalescent  
is a dislocation from that other life  
with the same sky  
a wall/another architecture

Rocking a little on the feet/trying  
to stand still      The hours  
peel back sweat/dry heat  
the stink of turps  
lodged behind my eyeballs  
like a mauve bruise  
The throat raw and the lungs rattle  
Something in the mind like ticker-tape  
The work-struck/walking-wounded world  
with no space left  
Or only the space of the fingers  
enough to twitch  
so this is it/this artist's life  
bound by the bandaged body of the nude  
and the head nodding  
no longer babbles

But only the stones  
Or the sound of blood  
The buried face of violence

In the past  
out of a sense of powerlessness  
we made ourselves martyrs  
old angers turned in/self destructive

Old angers in the pit of my stomach  
turn in on themselves  
tighten the muscles

A pencil scrapes on a line  
Graphite and a pulped tree

The body of the nude becomes myself  
I am mapped and charted

But I grow older and younger  
and in the same moment

I am tired of statues

GERRIE FELLOWS



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Review:

Francesco Clemente;

Steven Campbell;

At the Fruitmarket Gallery,  
Edinburgh.

The value of a good exhibition, for me, is if it draws you back to it, and more especially if it inspires you. In the same way that perhaps Julian Schnabel makes one want to smash up crockery, this vibrant exhibition (the only show in Britain, a real scoop for the Scottish Arts Council) makes me want to eat loads of vivid, luminous Rembrandt pastels. Clemente, a 33 year old Italian painter, had a lot working in his favour: being part of that current 'movement' (we are assured) in painting known in its umbrella term as the TransAvantGarde he is a European trailblazer, a nomadic traveller who sometimes lives in India, sometimes in New York, and sometimes he graces his own Italy with his presence. He is novel, he is foreign: reason enough for a one-man show in Edinburgh, so it would seem to someone faceless on the Arts Council.

With these reservations niggling me, I witnessed the Clemente exhibition on more than one occasion, and my verdict is that he does manage to pull it off: he plays fine tricks on narcissism. "Ten Bad Mothers", ten theme drawings, smacked us across the chops as we entered the gallery, and before you could say "Wili Bongard eats children for breakfast", we were captivated by his 21 pastel drawings on the opposite wall. In these drawings, Clemente takes us through a subjective mind-scape of fantasy, sex, death, myth, disorientation (you know, all the stuff that make a good existentialist dilemma worthwhile) in a gay celebration of expression that has spanned the last ten years.

Just what this guy is all about evades me, and indeed Clemente himself discourages a reading of meaning in his work. After seeing him on TV however (see review "Painting for Profit and Pleasure", this issue), my reservations about him were justified; he's an ambiguous opportunist (read insipid little shit). The reference to the TransAvantGarde is not incidental, it is inseparable from any discussion of new figurative painting, because it is a market determined novelty which has assured the success of Clemente and his buddies; Chia, Cucchi, Paladino, the American Schnabel and the new German painters. This new international market resurgence is something which the Fruitmarket has been embracing for the past two years, first with the Sandro Chia exhibition in '82, the Mulheimer Freiheit show, Modern French Painting, Basquiat, Clemente and more recently the critically acclaimed young (he's 30) Scottish painter, Stevie Cambell.

Perhaps that's wrong since I don't consider him to be a Scottish painter: he only became famous by going to New York to sell mythic romanticism of the tartan variety to rich Americans always in search of a lost culture while at the same time



destroying other cultures. Cambell's work does not challenge any set ideas about Scotland, it does not approach any issues inherent to the Scottish psychology: religious sectarianism, class, urban decay, unemployment, the destruction of community etc. Of course it would be vulgar and naive to advocate that all Scottish artists should deal with these issues or to become embroiled in the nationalist climate of one's own nation, but if an artist takes up the label and exploits certain notions about Scotland then it should do it truthfully. Cambell's figures cloaked in a semi-landscape, all tartan, angst-ridden and plus-4s, could only be of interest to a myopic Nationalist, the most moderate of intellectuals and the most gullible of art students. We are told in the exhibition handout that Cambell worked as a maintenance engineer in the shipyards, or something such like. What it means is that he was a worker. What can this passing remark mean? He was a worker, but now he has moved up a social strata, he has survived the toil and grind of being working-class, he is no longer on the front line of decaying consumer capitalism. Implied also is that he was at the bottom of the scrapheap - he is now at the top. Implicit in all this is the middle-class hierarchical structure of language which condemns the dispossessed of the world to their chains. Cambell's road to success is an example of reactionary indifference. Embracing literary and poetic fragments, Cambell plays safe and has found a true retreat (the artworld) from the harsh realities of the world.

I could never deny his talent, though. His work does have a power to move, attributable to their immense size, intricate detail, lavish use of paint and a great sense of design. Per-

haps, then, this is good, even great art, but is Cambell an artist? Does he provide insights into the human condition? Does he make important comments on society? Does he change the way we see the world? If this is the function of art and the artists, then Cambell fails on all three. His great failure is not being politically engaged, and the only thing that saves him is his wit and irony, similar perhaps to Glenn Baxter's cartoons. It is not enough for the Billy Bunting revival, however. His 'artist as hero' stance only adds to the myth of intellectual profundity surrounding the Romantic idea of the artist, and who can afford such ego-gratification at a time like this.

All this despair is in vain, however, for Cambell is a famous whizzkid, and once an artist becomes famous they become a private phenomenon, gory spectacles at art openings and things, where critics and the usual hobnobbers of students, socialites and retired councillors can be seen wading through scruples and integrity as thick as vomit up to the eyeballs just to be seen to be on the side of the successful. The trouble with success is that the work in question encourages copying, it becomes a formula for success. Fuelled and envious of the commercial success of Cambell, students are falling over themselves to be novel, big brash, banal and meaningless. Devotion engenders authority. Steven Cambell, if he hangs around Scotland for long enough (which I doubt), will be or perhaps is, the creme-de-la-creme of the turgid mainstream in Scottish art.

The task of good art criticism is to point out that this hardly matters: what's in today is out tomorrow according to the whims of the market-place. Art, knowledge, learning begins with the shattering of myths and illusions, the first premise of which is the destruction of heroes.

# WORKING AT IT

## a story

## by Farquhar McLay.

This morning when I coughed there was no blood in my mouth. That was something to feel pleased about. I was wary at first. I thought it might be a trick. The sick can play tricks with themselves. Anything to boost morale or even just to relieve boredom. Maybe the blood spitting itself was a trick. Anyway, after two days of it the sense of personal catastrophe had worn off. Evidently nothing new or interesting was going to happen to me. Just another of those dreary interludes to be endured as best one can. One can try enduring it or try kidding oneself out of it. And when I coughed and could taste no blood I thought I might be trying to kid myself out of it. How? By swallowing the blood before it could hit the palate. You give only gentle little coughs so that there is insufficient vigour to fetch the sputum up into the mouth. My tongue tasted of all manner of filth, but the unmistakable tang of one's own blood was missing. Old pulmonary cases will know the feeling. I could now go to the hospital with an easy mind. It would be all right to go now, now the haemorrhaging was over. I was coughing hard now with no signs of staining in the sputum. I could go to the hospital now with a good grip on myself. When the blood is running out of you it's another matter: you are theirs. When St. Francis kissed the leper he said: "She's mine." The medics like you on your back like that, all attemble, ready to submit to anything. Even a kiss will do. When St. Francis turned his back I hope she cursed his guts. She'd rather be an occasion of sin. Be sure you can muster strength to hurl abuse at them. Don't be the meat in the middle of the sandwich. Better an ingrate every time.

I was at the door of the Burnt Barns when old Jack Lynch drew out the bolts. I wanted a couple of rums to wash the shit out of my mouth. After several drinks the notion of the hospital went right out of my head. It was a nice sunny afternoon, so I decided to take a walk down Duke Street. When I got as far as the Labour Exchange I remembered I needed a new signing card. Also I felt like a sit down.

I went in and took a seat in front of a cubicle that had a

sign hanging over it saying: ENQUIRIES. After a long time a clerk came. He looked very worried when he saw me sitting there. he went into a kind of dither and looked to be on the point of summoning help. "I can do nothing for you," he shouted. "You're in the wrong place. You have to go to the Job Centre." He kept well back on his side of the broad counter. Maybe I looked like a madman or maybe the fumes of the rum had wafted across to him. I suppose he knew a long-standing member when he saw one. Some long-standing members could be trouble. In Partick I once saw a clerk pummelled and throttled till the life was almost out of him. I had nothing like that in mind. All I wanted was a new signing card. Fungoid growths were appearing on the old one which was crumbling to dust in my pocket. I explained these things in timid and deferential tones. The quaint and simple nature of my mission disarmed him. He tried a smile which was still-born. He sat-down, took out a packet of cigarettes and started to smoke. From a filing cabinet by his side he drew out a brand new yellow card. He fingered it with a delicate touch. "Actually," he said in a whisper, casting a quick glance over his shoulder, you can forget the Job Centre. There's nothing there. Times are bad, I'm afraid, very bad indeed."

I was pleased with him. He had the look of somebody I once knew. Who it was I couldn't quite get at first. At the same time I was certain I had not seen the clerk before. It gets wearisome seeing the same old faces each time I visit here. It's a relief when one dies at his post or gets a transfer. I imagine it's a killer of a job. I've seen new clerks starting off, bright and crisp and perky, and in a year or two they're as mouldy and decayed as my old signing card.

In large letters the clerk wrote DUP in the top left-hand corner of my resplendent new card. He kept the card in front of him, lifted his head back for a better view of me, and took a deep drag at his cigarette. He seemed in no hurry to terminate matters.

"Have you been out of work long?" he asked.

"A wee while," I said.

He shook his head in commiseration.

"But not as long as some," I added. "I was hearing about this man in Greenock, and he's been signing on, so I'm told, for forty-one years without a break. I have a bit to go to equal that."

The clerk was aghast. "Forty-one years? But that's his whole working life. How could anybody hold out that long? I think I'd kill myself first."

Then it came to me. I suddenly knew who he put me in mind of and why I mentioned the man in Greenock, who might or might not have been an invention. It was my uncle Larry, and he was not an invention.

Uncle Larry had seldom done a day's work in his life. On the day I left school and was freed from one set of frauds and fakirs, along came Larry with bodements of even worse evil ahead. He had brought along a brand-new pair of dungarees which were still in the Greenwood's parcel as on the day he'd bought them - "Afore yi wur born, son," he assured me, lang, lang afore."

He put a hand on my shoulder and took me to one side. "Like it or no, laddie, yir a wurkin man noo, an ah juist hope yill hiv mair luck than whit ah hud. Yir a breidwinner noo, dinna furget, an yir mither's luikin ti yi tae dae weel. There's nae uise at aa in fullin yir heid wi a lot o nonsense aboot whit's in front o yi. It's a hard, sair struggle an whatever wee bit they gie yi yill hae earned. Bit here's a couple o tips tae steer yi right. Never come ower tae onybody aboot whit yir py is. Ay watch whit yir sayin whin yi hear fly guys slaggin the boss, fur your words'll be kerried back tae him, stand on me. An mynd ayways say YES SIR when the boss is talkin ti yi. Never jyne in arguments aboot politics ur religion, fur there's gey few wurkin men unerstaun a thing aboot the yin ur the other. An above aa, watch yir time-keepin, fur bad time-keepin is a shair sign yi hate yir wurk. You heed ma wurd's an yill no go faur wrang."

And with these grave words, and an air of high solemnity, my uncle at last relinquished his grip on the parcel. It was an affecting moment. The first and only time Larry ever gave me anything in his life. They togged me up in the overalls like people observing a ritual. I had come of age. The whole family marvelled and clapped me on the back and said what a lucky fellow I was to be going out in the world with a boilersuit like that, after it had been tended with some loving care for the better part of a lifetime.

Everybody had a good laugh, even Larry was laughing. There were loud guffaws whenever Larry's admonishments were repeated. I myself laughed as much as anybody, inclining to my aunt Jessie's opinion that "there wur some matters that Larry wudnae ken ka hail lot about".

After my first day in industry I wasn't laughing. I had entered a bedlam of smoke, din, bad smells and gruesome toil. It was like a descent into hell. The noxious fumes left me gasping for breath and the evil smells made me want to vomit. My job was mixing asbestos, which they called "monkey dung", and fetching the stuff in two large buckets up and down a complicated system of ladders and catwalks to where the time-served men waited for it. You never could get enough of it to them, or get it to them fast enough. All day long they screamed for the stuff like a pack of hungry jackals. In a short time Larry's lovely new boilersuit was splattered thick with "monkey dung". My body too seemed to be polluted with the stench and no amount of scrubbing could rid me of it. I very soon forgot all about my new status as breidwinner and began to keep an eye open for a quick mode of escape.

It came on my third day. The boys' gaffer, a squinny-eyed little toe-rag the name of Ramsay, got wind that three of us were up at the forge taking an unofficial tea-break. The can sat on the fire, brewing away nicely, with the three of us huddled over it, puffing at dows and arguing about football, the only debate the dispossessed can engage in with and easy conscience. At the last minute somebody shouted a warning and when Ramsay appeared we were all pretending to be busy at different tasks. But the tell-tale can still stood on the fire.

"Whose tea is that?" Ramsay bellowed. The rejoinder was off my tongue before I had time to think about it.

"Brooke-fucking-Bond's," I said.

The others turned their faces away to laugh, but Ramsay knew they had heard and knew they were laughing, and with those

three words and that hidden laughter my career in industry was blessedly at an end. Ten minutes later I was sailing across the Clyde on the Finnieston ferry, a measly two days wages in my pocket, sacked on the spot. I quickly disburdened myself of the dungarees and plopped them into the river. The hateful things sank like a stone. Not that it has always been easy. Over the years I have had to devise some ingenious stratagems to avoid them. I have had to work at it. Not like today, with millions begging for the right to wear overalls, and being refused.

As I sat there struggling with the impulse to impart the little fable of the dungarees, trying to calculate the chances of a favourable, or at least only mildly abusive, reaction, the clerk, using both hands, pushed my new signing card over to me.

"I wouldn't be too depressed if I were you," he said with a sigh. "The recession won't last forever, you know. Somewhere in Whitehall, right at this very minute, there are people who know about these things, sitting round a table planning the recovery. You mark my words, there's a boom on the way."

Now there was compassion for you. He was smiling. The smile had at last come to life on his face. He was seeing me in overalls, my peeces in one pocket, a Daily Record in the other.

"Mind you," he put in quickly, bending forward and speaking in a whisper, "you'll have to be ready for the time when it comes. We don't know the hour, we don't know the day, but be sure of one thing: it's coming. So get yourself spruced up. Keep yourself active. You could even take evening class. It's never too late." He leant even closer, his voice deepened. "Think of the advantage you'll have over the others."

The clerk was aglow. He had delivered himself of the good news and was aglow. I might have been the leper under the kiss, or the failed claimant in Partick doing his nut. Yes take the bastard by the throat, scream it into face: "Keep your mangy fucking boom! Get your obscene vomit from under my nose!" Or no, no.

I pocketed the card and got up. Somewhere a telephone rang and went on ringing. In the background I saw a long line of desks with clerks and clerkesses leafing through files. The telephone went on ringing. Nobody looked up.

I took two steps back, unbuttoned myself and peed - peed all over that shiny floor, peed till the clerk's bright glow and the light of the great new boom were all but extinguished.

# King after one at home

## to protect



...ns-tested. You can work out whether  
t by adding up the money you and your  
if it is less than the sum DHSS sets for  
ances.

its

Look up your qualifying level in the table below.

Claim FIS if your income is less than this.

- If you have one child you qualify with an income under £82.50 a week
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  - If you have 4 children you qualify with an income under £110.50 a week or loan, tick yes
- For each extra child in your home another £9.00 a week

Do these other owners live in your home with you?

- No  go to the next question  
Yes  give their full names

Do these other owners live in your home with you?

- No  go to the next question  
Yes  go to the next question

Do you have a lease?

- No  go to the next question  
Yes  when the lease is more than 21 years

No   
Yes

Do you pay ground rent in Scotland?

- No  go to the next question  
Yes

See also NI. 195  
and NI. 208

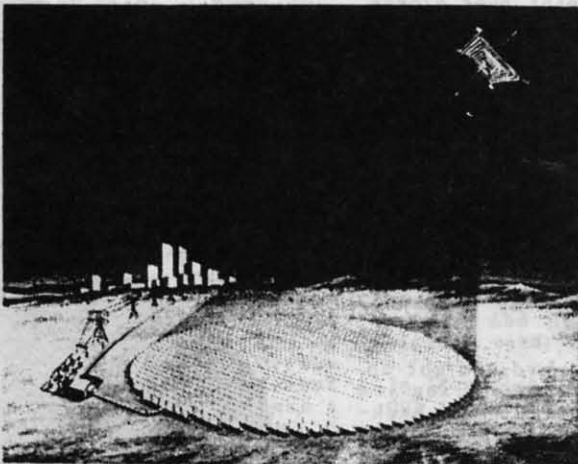
UTOPIAS at the Third Eye.

A survey of Utopian designs from Thomas More until the 1970s linking ideas by themes. As an exhibition it forms a good introduction: its good points are the lack of ambiguity, the linking of Utopian thought to current building and the inclusion of local examples. Interpretations of current architectural fashion were sharp and to the point.

It was hard to skim and choose points of personal interest to look at because of the bulk of the text and because of the lack of sub-titles within the text - although the breaking into themes certainly helped.

I'd have liked to see a section on Utopian thought; political Utopias, an exploration of what sort of person dreams up Utopias to the point of actually putting them onto paper and maybe even building them. It would have been interesting to see more up to date examples of Utopian thought and projects: examples that spring to mind: from the 1970s, Arcosanti, Scoraig (a commune near Ullapool), various proposals for space colonies, ideas from beyond Europe and America, peace camps, and the currently flourishing computer addicts' proposals which could easily become part of the machine 'mind'; this would fit well in the exhibition section on Utopian planning featuring lunatic asylums.

The exhibition showed ideas are often put into practice when building for the least powerful sections of the population; this is of course very relevant to Glasgow with its huge stock of post-war public housing.



NASA

Plans for the colonization of Space call for transmission of energy from Satellite Solar Power Stations to Earth via microwave beams, but little is known (and much is suspected) about the effects of such beams.

# VARIANT

a radical arts magazine



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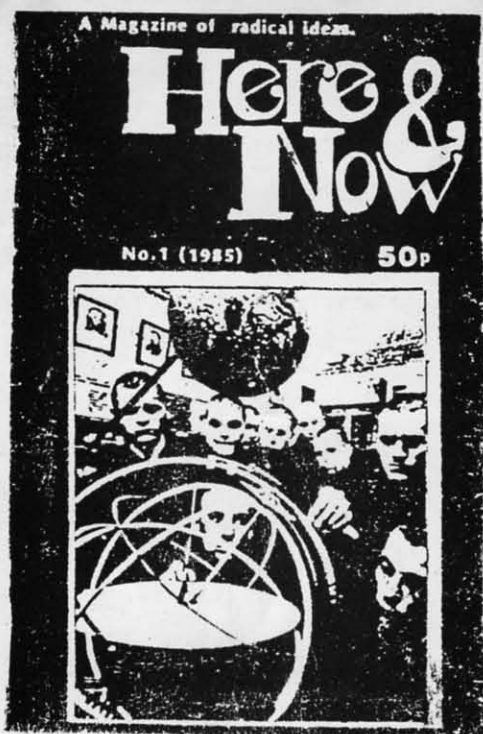
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Review: "Here & Now; a magazine of Radical Ideas"  
Malcolm Dickson.



"Here & now" is a new magazine produced by a collective in the West of Scotland and aimed at all those interested in developing a theory of the dynamics of modern society. Although based in Glasgow, it is stressed that this is not a provincial magazine, its concern being to view social change in an international context, and if I'm not mistaken is being distributed to at least a dozen countries.

The articles in Issue One are all theoretical in tone, a piece on the miners dispute, 3 book reviews, an article on teachers ("whose class are you in?"), a raving anti-Marxist rant, and article which discusses the formation of revolutionary consciousness outside the workplace, a centre spread on the "Communism of the Kampuchean Angkar" (the real story), an article called "The Political Personality", and one on the scenario for revolution ("The Revolution Starts at Closing Time"). Although they are all quite long, one isn't deterred as there are some positive attempts to come to grips with the social forces at work in the here and now. The whole magazine lacks political sloganising, and its contributors "reject hand-me-down politics of any label and insist on the need to understand what is unique to our time." It is a welcome attempt to organise revolutionary ideas and activities into a 'coherent

approach', and those familiar with the 'Solidarity' magazine of the '70s will embrace this publication, even if only on the glossy cover and well-printed contents. It seeks to break with the marginalised political activity of previous revolutionary minorities, and as Jim McFarlane put it; "In launching the magazine, our principal motive isn't to simply add variety to the multitude of publications available for consumption. The creation of a medium for dialogue, controversy and subjecting doctrines to scrutiny, with a view to advancing theory beyond statements is at the centre of our approach."

The first task in developing a consciousness of opposition to the dominant culture is, as is pointed out, to ask the right questions, to identify how the system reproduces itself. All this discussion is not for the sake of ideological purity or for academic prestige, but is for the aim of defining what revolutionary activity might be. As such it is a valid contribution to the social war of our times. Despite the present crushing of the last possible expression of the classical workers movement on the form of the miners' strike, there are many neglected possibilities, many signs pointing towards the widespread subversion of the dominant ideology. The great shame is that the majority of the population are unaware of this, let alone the traditional left groups. T.D. quotes the South African novelist Nadine Gordimer in the review of "After the Revolution":

"Communism has turned out not to be just or human either; it has failed, even more cruelly than capitalism. Does this mean that we have to tell the poor and the dispossessed of the world that there is nothing to be done?"

"Here & Now" is available from Changes Bookshop, Box 2, 340 West Princes Street, Glasgow G4 9HF. It costs 50p plus postage (cheques payable to GPP, not "Here & Now").



# YOU

MAY BE THE  
NEXT VICTIM:

## ART ATTACK

# I'M A REAL ARTIST

### Do You Know the Symptoms?

1. Glazed Eyes
2. Shallow Breathing
3. Clammy Skin
4. Nausea
5. Victim May Smell of  
Linseed Oil and Formaldehyde

Art Attack victims will usually be found in museums, galleries and Art schools. (Art students have been found to have a propensity for attacks.) The fatal attack may be preceded by the onset of general studio malaise, and an occasional incidence of gallery narcolepsy. When the victim becomes aware of the division between his mundane life and his sanctified Art, he may attempt a self-cure through conceptual Art, punk, or other popular forms of "Anti-Art." A more effective treatment involves the artist revolutionizing his relationship to the Art World. A simple case may be alleviated with the smashing of a particular work of Art. More advanced cases may require the destruction of entire galleries, museums and Art schools.